Issue 5 Summer 2009

MINOTAUR

The Official, Irregular Webzine of the Mazes & Minotaurs Revival

DESERT KINGDOM SUMMER SPECIAL

LGS

MINOTAUR n°5

A Word from the Editor

Holidays in the (Desert) Sun

Welcome to the fifth issue of the **Minotaur**… a very special issue, which takes you south of the Middle Sea, to a realm of burning sands, strange gods and mysterious pyramids – the Desert Kingdom, which is to Ancient Egypt what the Three Cities and Umbria (respectively covered in issues 2 and 4) are to Ancient Greece : in other words, expect many similarities... as well as a quite a few typically Mythikan twists and, of course, a healthy dose of old school sword & sorcery clichés - oops, I meant, of course, old school *sword & sorcery* genre tropes.

So what does make this issue that different from the four previous ones ? Well, the sheer size of the Desert Kingdom special feature – including the most detailed *Mythika Gazetteer* ever published, with its awesome 22 pages of pseudo-Egyptian goodness !

When our friend Andrew Pearce started working on the Desert Kingdom Gazetteer last year, churning out pages after pages of wondrous mythikal stuff faster than a hyperactive scribe possessed by Hermes himself, it soon became obvious that our "Desert Kingdom dossier" would have more to do with a mini-supplement rather than with a mere 'extra-length feature'… and here it is – a whole new kingdom of adventure for *Mazes & Minotaurs*, complete with its dynasties, deities and denizens.

As the page count rose higher and higher, we decided to make this issue a 100% Desert Kingdom special, sending some of our regular columns (such as the *Griffin Archives*) on a little summer vacation but our good friend Luke G. Reynard threatened us with various forms of retaliation if we didn't publish his regular *Twist in the Maze*, so for the sake of variety (and because Luke can be quite persuasive), this issue also includes some non-Desert Kingdom material, including rules on things like lynothoraxes and peltasts and some new wrestling options.

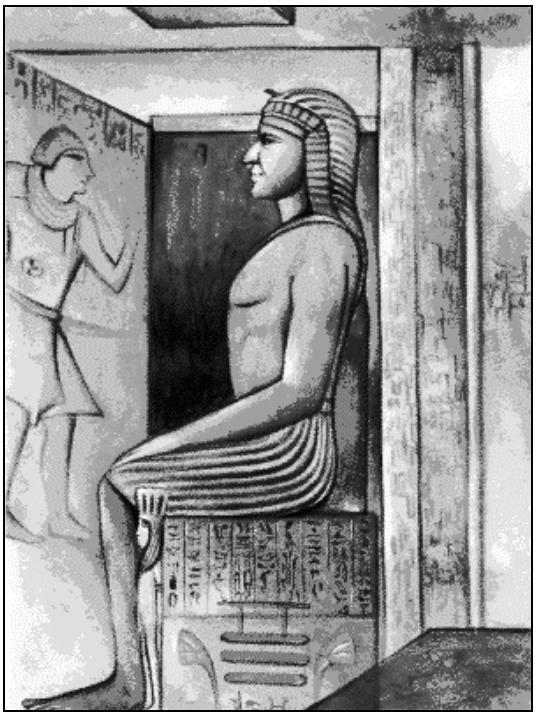
So here it is : our biggest, fattest issue ever, with its 57 pages of 100% free gaming material.

Next issue's *Mythika Gazetteer* will take us to the (much) colder climes of Hyperborea, northern land of the Barbarians !

Until then, enjoy the burning sands of our summer special… Long live the Minotaur !

Olivier Legrand (2009)

Desert Kingdom Special !



Raiders of the Lost Pyramid

Fearless Archaeologist : Andrew Pearce.

Dotty Old Professor : Olivier Legrand.

Stalwart Caravan Master : Peter Larsson

Unidentified Mummy : Luke G. Reynard.

Hieroglyph Expert : Kevin Scrivner

Bas-Reliefs : Chuck Parish, Willy Pogany, Pahko and Various Other Anonymous Artists.

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All game material included in this webzine uses the **Revised M&M** rules (1987 edition).

In Memoriam

This issue of *The Minotaur* is humbly dedicated to the memory of **Dave Arneson** (1947-2008), grand architect of Blackmoor.

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MYTHIKA GAZETTEER

OBSERVATIONS OF

THE DESERT KINGDOM

As Faithfully Recorded by ***Anagnosis of Thena*** *& Translated by* ***Andrew Pearce***

A Word of Caution

My much-esteemed colleague Anagnosis of Thena has asked me to add some words of commendation to his instructive thesis of the Desert Kingdom. I am most happy to do so, and to praise my respected associate for his eloquence, his enthusiasm, and his erudition.

Nevertheless, I feel compelled to point out that, for all his learning, some of the views proffered by Anagnosis are not entirely without controversy, and that other notable scholars hold alternative viewpoints about, for example, the methods by which the ancient pyramids of the Desert Kingdom were built, or the veracity of the various legends surrounding the First Dynasty. With this caveat, I most whole-heartedly and warmly commend my learned friend's treatise.

Anaximander of Cresos

Introduction

Mysterious, captivating, ancient, inscrutable, beguiling, fantastical…these are but are a few of the epithets that have been applied in describing the Desert Kingdom.

For many centuries, tales of the Desert Kingdom have attracted and repelled, in almost equal measure, the citizens of the Three Cities. The civilisation of the Desert Kingdom is without doubt one of the greatest within the known world, and amongst the most long-lived. In the popular imagination it conjures up visions of splendid pyramids and magnificent palaces, of fabulous treasures and frightful curses, of exotic animal-headed gods and powerful god-kings, of forbidding shrines and lost cities, buried deep beneath the unforgiving desert sands. But for most Mineans, real knowledge of the Desert Kingdom is both scant and inadequate, filled as it is with glaring contradictions and wild fancies that bear little resemblance to the truth.

I, Anagnosis of Thena, have made it my life's ambition to study the chronicles, the achievements and the customs of this distant yet splendid realm. My interest in the Desert Kingdom, its peoples and its legends, was kindled more than forty years ago, in my youth. My father, Stratho of Xekanthos, was a fine merchant-captain, and a fearless explorer. Back in the days of Menemkhet III he was one of the very few Minean traders then allowed access to the markets of Pstatis, the great sea-port of the Desert Kings. On his third voyage to the Desert Kingdom, I accompanied him.

A Khettim Nobleman in ceremonial dress

As a mere stripling of ten years, I soon fell in love with the splendours and the sights that I beheld in that city. In all my boyhood, I never wept so bitterly as on that day when we began the return voyage to Thena. I vowed then that I would return – and have done so more than a dozen times since.

Of course, in the last ten years, under the guidance of Menemkhet's son, the rather more enlightened King Nebheptah II, the country has opened up to outsiders in a way that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. Since then, many 'scholars' (so-called) have travelled up and down the Khet, and some of them have been very free indeed with the hasty and ill-considered conclusions of their injudicious and entirely opportunistic expeditions.

The publication by Cleonthides of Argos of his absurd monograph on the step-pyramid of King Neferkaure has finally forced me to respond. No longer can I ignore the shoddy research and spurious assertions of so-called 'experts' on the Desert Kingdom. My most recent discourses at the Akademia have been well-received,

which is most gratifying; but it is time that the conclusions of my exhaustive enquiries into the Desert Kingdom reached a wider audience.

There may be much in my account that will baffle or disturb those of a credulous disposition – for my task is to tell the truth that I have observed about the Desert Kingdom, and in so doing there are many cherished myths that will be dispelled. But I truly believe – as do my many supporters at the Akademia – that there is none other in the Three Cities who is so well placed to give an accurate and detailed description of this most enigmatic, yet most alluring of nations.

The Land

No description of the Desert Kingdom and its people, the *Khettim* (literally 'those of the river'), can begin without an appreciation of the land itself – for no nation has been more greatly shaped by its geography than the Land of the Desert Kings.

The River Khet

At the heart of the Desert Kingdom is the River Khet, the River of Kings, which flows from the south to the north of the realm.

Rising in the distant Black Hills, the Khet meanders its way for more than seven hundred miles through the desert before discharging into the Middle Sea (the *Wadj-wer* or 'Great Green' as the Khettim know it).

According to the myths and legends of the Khettim, the Desert Kingdom was once largely swampland, but as the climate grew drier the Khet retreated, leaving a strip of fertile soil on both banks. This soil is refreshed each year by the floodwaters that cover the fields with a rich black mud in which plants grow readily.

The Khettim refer to this fertile belt – which is rarely more than two or three miles wide on either side of the Khet, and sometimes less – as the 'Black Land'.

Most of the agricultural land of the kingdom (more than nine-tenths of it) is found within these narrow confines. Only in the Khet Delta is this arable land somewhat more expansive.

An oasis in the Great Desert

Majestic pyramids in the Great Desert

The Great Desert

Scattered across the Desert Kingdom are an unknown number of fertile oases. The routes to these oases are often carefully guarded secrets, and no-one – not even the Desert King – knows them all. Some of the oases are inhabited by humans, but others are held by the Ubasti, or are home to even more dangerous creatures.

The Great Desert – also known as the 'Red Land' and the 'Mirror of Fire' – stretches for hundreds of miles both west and east of the Khet. There are only a handful of secure routes across the desert, mostly making use of the scattered oases.

The relative inaccessibility of the Khet valley has afforded the Desert Kingdom with relative security throughout most of its history – but at the cost of making its people inward-looking and somewhat xenophobic towards outsiders. It has also made them rather complacent about defending their realm, so that on the relatively few occasions that foreign armies have been able to breach its formidable natural defences, the consequences have generally been disastrous.

To the east, the sand-dunes of the Mirror of Fire eventually give way to the Hills of Brass and the Mountains of Cadmea. The Hills of Brass are so-called because of their distinctive appearance, reminiscent of burnished brass; they are also home to substantial deposits of copper. Alas, many monstrous creatures also make their homes in these hills, as well as several ferocious tribes of Scorpion Folk. Many of the minerals and semi-precious stones of the Desert Kingdom are mined in the Mountains of Cadmea, including agate, carnelian, gold and tin. The mountains are also one of the last refuges of the Hawkmen of the South, a fierce and noble race of winged humanoids who worship Horus as their paramount god.

Beyond the Borders

Beyond the Mountains of Cadmea lies the **South Sea**. At various times of expansion, the Desert Kingdom has established trading posts along the western shores of this sea. Produce from this area has included salt, dyes, and pearls, and the trading posts have often served as the off-loading point for merchant-ships bearing exotic cargos from the Land of the Sun, including spices, incense, hardwoods, silk and ivory.

To the south-west of the Mountains of Cadmea lie the **Black Hills** – a debatable land now mostly inhabited by the scattered remnants of the Anubian Clans, ancient and implacable enemies of the Desert Kingdom.

To the west of the Great Desert are the forbidding uplands that lie at the heart of the **Stygian Empire**; the Atas Antar, or Mountains of Doom. According to some Khettim myths, the cave-entrance through which Ra was tricked into descending into the underworld is located in the Mountains of Doom. Few Khettim dare travel from the Desert Kingdom in that direction.

To the north-west, the Desert Kingdom abuts the semi-arid land of **Midia**, sometimes known by Mineans (somewhat misleadingly) as the Land of the South.

Midia is home to a diverse population of traders, sea-farers and rogues. Its original inhabitants, a Charybdian people, were conquered by the Midians – a race of mariners hailing according to legend from the Land of the Sun – at the beginning of the Age of Magic.

At various times in its history, Midia has been subject to the Tritonian Heptarchs or to the Desert Kings – but at other times it has been fearlessly and proudly independent, under the rule of the descendents of Dido, first queen of Solus. However, the energetic and adventurous Midians are now very much a minority in their own land, which has become the abode of a cosmopolitan mix of peoples of Minean, Khettim, Charybdian and Tritonian descent.

Beyond Midia lies the land of **Charybdis** (also known as *Charybdia*) home to the primitive culture of the dark-skinned Charybdians, as well as (it is commonly believed) the remnants of the Serpent Folk. This wild and largely-unexplored land has only on rare occasions received the attention of the Desert Kings.

To the north-east of the Desert Kingdom is the **Land of the Sun**: ruled by a succession of fierce and proud monarchs that have often viewed the Desert Kingdom with lust and envy.

Several times in its history the Land of the Sun has been subjected to brutal invasion from the Desert Kingdom, and the Hills of Brass has often been disputed territory between them. Yet on other occasions the Land of the Sun has been the greatest trading partner of the Desert Kingdom, and several of the queens of the Desert Kings have come from the eastern lands. Relations between these two mighty yet strange realms are complex and often difficult for outsiders to comprehend.

Finally, to the north, the Desert Kingdom faces the vastness of the **Middle Sea**. The peoples of the Desert Kingdom are, for the most part, poor sailors – adept enough at navigating the waterways of their beloved River of Kings, but quite literally all at sea when facing the open expanses of the 'Great Green'.

Invasion has sometimes come from this direction – and the memories of cruel marauders from the island of Typhon (later known as **Tritonis**) still stir uneasily whenever the people of the Desert Kingdom look northward across the great waters.

The Twelve Nomes

There are only a very few settlements in the Desert Kingdom that are large enough to rate the title city. They include Pstatis, the great sea-port on the Middle Sea; Amedfa, the historic capital from the Middle Kingdom Period; and Sebentos, current home to the royal court. Next down from the cities are the townships which act as the administrative centres for each district or *nome*. Each of the twelve nomes has its own governor (or *nomarch*), its own specialist industries, and its own patron god.

The nomes of the Desert Kingdom are often grouped into three tiers, each consisting of four nomes: those of the Lower Khet (or the Khet Delta) in the north; those of the Middle Khet; and those of the Upper Khet in the south. In addition, the nomes are numbered from north to south (and, in the Delta, from west to east) :

Nomes of the Lower Khet

1st Nome (capital Hawada), in the north-west of the Delta. Hawada is one of the oldest settlements in the Desert Kingdom, reportedly once the home of the Ubasti before they were expelled to the western oases. Its patron goddess is Bastet. The finest singers and dancers in the Desert Kingdom come from Hawada.

2nd Nome (capital Pstatis), in the north of the Delta. Many fine buildings – mostly dating back to the days of the Typhonian occupation – are located in the sea-port of Pstatis, including the Lighthouse of Pstatis, and the Library of Thoth. Notionally, the patron god of Pstatis is Thoth – but the worship of Typhon is also strong, and the biggest temple to the chaos god in the Desert Kingdom is found in Pstatis. Although papyrus is grown throughout the Delta, the highest-quality papyrus is said to be found in Pstatis.

3rd Nome (capital So), in the north-east of the Delta. So is a rather grim settlement that for centuries has served as the garrison-town of the north. Its patron god is Set, but the worship of Sekhmet, goddess of war, is also strong here.

4th Nome (capital Amedfa), in the south of the Delta. Amedfa was the historic capital of the Desert Kingdom during the Second Dynasty. Many of the buildings from that era (such as the Old Palace of the Kings) are now derelict. Most of the imposing pyramids of the Middle Kingdom (including the famous Blue Pyramid) are situated on the nearby necropolis of Abusre. The patron god of Amedfa is Ra. The finest scribes of the Desert Kingdom are said to come from Amedfa.

Nomes of the Middle Khet

5th Nome (capital Kebet), famous for the Rose Temple of its patron goddess, Hathor. The most expensive and luxuriant unguents and perfumes of the Desert Kingdom are produced in Kebet. The cattle of Kebet are also said to be of the finest quality – appropriate for a district where the cow goddess is honoured.

6th Nome (capital On), this wealthy district has for centuries been famous for the quality of its linen, and is reputedly home to the finest goldsmiths in the Desert Kingdom. Its patron god is Maat. On also stands at the cross-roads of more caravan routes across the desert than any other town, and this has helped to form its reputation as a foremost centre of trade and commerce.

7th Nome (capital Sebentos). Once an obscure and little-regarded district, for two and a half centuries this has been the site of the royal court. According to legend, the heroic demigod Osiris was born here. Not surprisingly, there is a considerable cult centred on Osiris and Isis in Sebentos; but the official patron god is Horus. The largest building in Sebentos is the Royal Palace built by Menemkhet I. Sebentos is well-regarded for the excellence of its wines.

8th Nome (capital Shadyet). The patron goddess of this relatively-unimportant district is Meretseger, guardian of tombs. Just outside Shadyet itself lies the second-largest necropolis of the Desert Kingdom, which includes the site of the first pyramid, the Step Pyramid of Neferkaure. Much of the best stone used in the building projects of the Desert Kings has been quarried from this district.

Nomes of the Upper Khet

9th Nome (capital Ipetsut). The patron god of this district is Taweret. Reputedly, the very best midwifes and wet-nurses in the Desert Kingdom come from this district, and they are very much in demand amongst the upper classes throughout the Desert Kingdom.

10th Nome (capital Keshtor). Although very briefly the capital of the Desert Kingdom under the last king of the Second Dynasty, Keshtor is not a well-regarded district. Its people are commonly-regarded by other Khettim as indolent and stupid. A particularly-unflattering insult amongst the Khettim (outside Keshtor, of course) is to accuse one's mother, wife or daughter of being 'a daughter of Keshtor'. The patron god of this district is Khnum – but, alas, despite his patronage, the artisans of Keshtor are not particularly noted for their skill.

11th Nome (capital Om-kibor). The patron god of this district is Sobek. However, Horus also has a strong following here, and Om-kibor is noted for its unusual double-temple to these rival gods. Om-kibor is also famous for producing some of the finest jewellery in the Desert Kingdom.

12th Nome (capital Persekhmet), the southern-most district of the Desert Kingdom. Like So, Persekhmet is a garrison-town, and the soldiers stationed here keep constant guard against any threat from the perfidious Anubians to the south. Sekhmet is the patron goddess.

The People

Daily Life in the Desert Kingdom

Most Khettim live not in the cities and towns, but in the hundreds of small villages that abound along the banks of the River of Kings. Their occupations and trades are simple – most engage in farming or fishing, although each village with have a few craftsmen and artisans.

A few Khettim live a more nomadic lifestyle, and are involved in the caravan trade that plies the Great Desert, travelling from oasis to oasis, from one trading post to another.

Society in the Desert Kingdom consists of four broad classes: the upper, middle, lower and slave classes.

At their head stand the king and the royal family, who hold ultimate power.

Making up the rest of the upper class are the vizier (the king's chief counsellor), the priests, scribes, physicians, noblemen and officials of the royal court. The nobility own the largest houses, wear the finest clothes and jewellery, and eat the choicest food. Only the children of the upper class are educated. Only the upper class can afford the expense of the lavish funerals that are so associated with the Desert Kingdom. And only members of the upper class are permitted to take one or two concubines in addition to their wife.

Traders and merchants belong to the middle class, upon which the great wealth of the Desert Kingdom largely depends. The middle class also includes craftsmen and dancers.

Taxes are levied by the king on most goods, and this contributes hugely to the royal treasuries.

Duties of the King

Most Desert Kings were trained for their future role as leader of the Khettim from their childhood. The king is the commander-in-chief of the army, as well as being responsible for the administration of the country, and representing his people to the gods in the temples.

His ceremonial duties include attending the 'Opening of the Dykes', a ritual following the annual flooding of the Khet in which the king himself always cuts the first irrigation channel; and, every six years, leading the *sed* festival, at which the nobility renew their pledges to the king, and re-enact his coronation.

Of course, much of the time of the king (and the rest of the nobility) is spent engaging in more leisurely activities: board-games (such as the popular *senet*), music and dance, and hunting (especially of lions, hippos, antelopes, gazelles and ostriches) are common pursuits of the upper class.

The largest group is the lower class, which is made up of peasant farmers and other unskilled labourers. When times are good, members of the lower class share in the prosperity of the kingdom, but when times are bad, they are the first to suffer. In addition, unskilled workers are sometimes conscripted to work alongside slaves upon the lavish building projects of the kings. For many from the lower class, their greatest hope of escaping the drudgery of common life is to become a soldier.

At the foot of society is the slave class, which includes the maids, gardeners and cooks employed in the households of wealthy families, as well as captured enemy soldiers who are forced to work on the king's monuments. The nobility want to be sure of having servants in the afterlife, and so when they die they have clay models of their servants, called *shabtis*, buried with them. In the days of the First and Second Dynasties, it was common practice for the slaves of a king to be entombed with him when he died in order to serve him in the afterlife. This barbaric practice fell into disuse following the end of the Middle Kingdom, and now the kings are buried with *shabtis* just like the nobility.

Shabtis and Mummies

One common misconception amongst the Mineans (which Cleonthides of Argos persists in repeating) is that the Khettim nobility would commonly use magically-animated mummies to guard their tombs. Actually, such practices, which are common amongst the necromantic Lords of the Stygian Empire, are unknown within the Desert Kingdom.

What is undoubtedly true is that many of the tombs of the royal family and the greater nobility are guarded by enchanted clay Animates known as *shabtis* that are capable of fighting against intruders.

This practice dates from the late Middle Kingdom, and has been revived in New Kingdom times.

Money

The Desert Kingdom economy is based on the principle of bartering. Negotiating over prices is often complicated, as the relative value of goods does fluctuate. However, there are two measurements of fairly stable value that are commonly used: weights of copper (known as *deben*); and jars (*hin* or pints) of oil. Two *deben* of copper are the equivalent of one *hin* of oil. The cost of a few common goods (in *deben*) is given below:

Item	Cost	Item	Cost
Linen skirt	5	Camel	100
Leather skirt	10	Spear	5
10 loaves of bread	2	Dagger	2
Amphora of beer	2	Axe	5
Amphora of wine	4	Mace	5
Papyrus (6 sheets)	1	Bow	8
Papyrus boat	50	Arrows (six)	1
Goat	3	Shield	12
Donkey	30	Rope (30 feet)	2

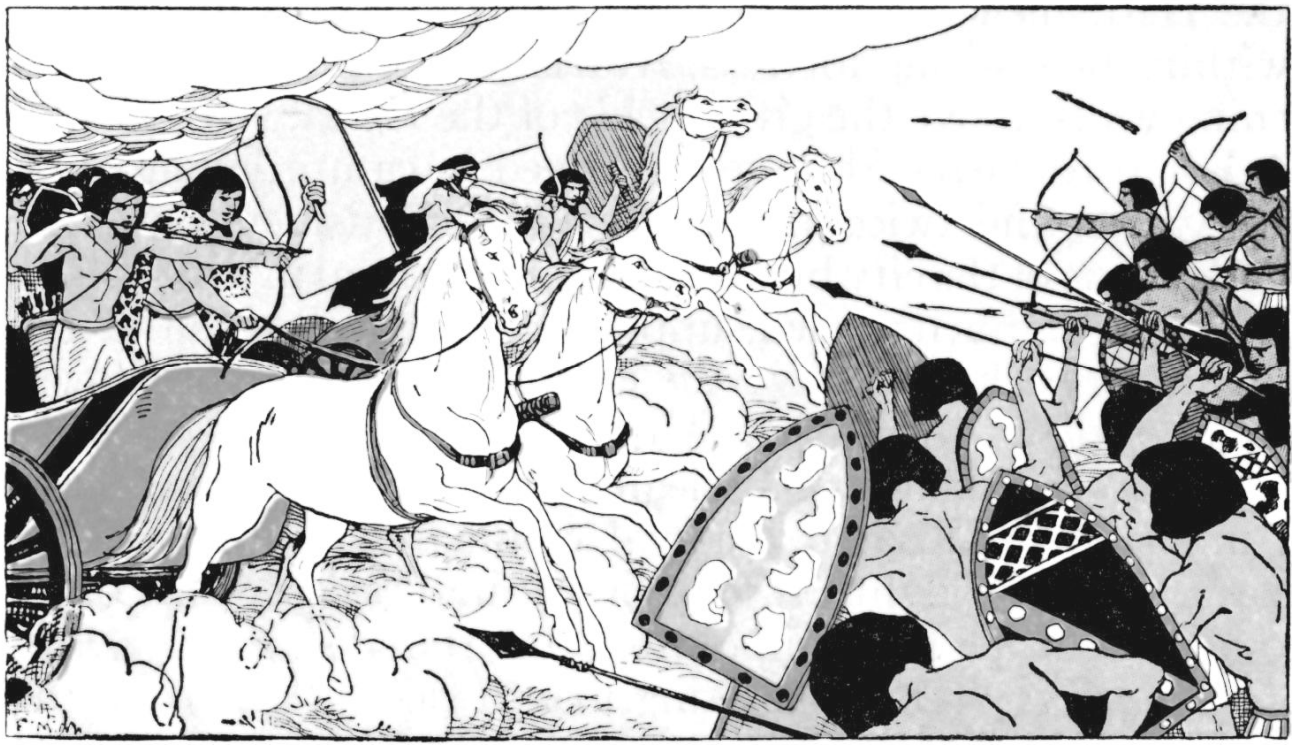
Clothing amongst the Khettim

Because of the hot climate, Khettim adults wear very little in the way of clothing, and their children usually wear nothing at all.

Most ordinary men wear simple loincloths around their waist, or short skirts, and little else, although more important individuals generally wear longer, calf-length pleated skirts of fine linen (made from flax).

Women wear long dresses with shoulder straps, sometimes with beads sown into them, and light pleated skirts over the top. Most clothing is plain white, although sometimes it is dyed, most commonly orange, green or yellow.

A fashion-conscious Khettim girl



Priests generally wear clothing dyed in accordance to the favoured colour of their patron deity, whilst senior priests wear leopard skins as a mark of their status in society.

Footwear varies widely according to social status. Poor people tend to go barefoot or wear simple sandals made from papyrus. Wealthier individuals might have sandals made of leather, or even gold.

All Khettim shave their heads using bronze razors. The wealthy, including the king himself, cover their bare heads with black shoulder-length wigs. These are made from human hair or sheep's wool, and are held in place by beeswax. Over his wig, the king often wears a blue and white striped headdress (a *nemes*), or, on ceremonial occasions, a crown.

Make-up is commonly used by both men and women. The wealthy draw a distinctive heavy black line around their eyes, using an eye-paint known as *kohl*. This helps to reduce the glare of the sun. Also popular with all classes are various amulets, such as the eye (or *wadjet*) of Horus (a ward against evil), the *ankh* (symbol of life), fish amulets (given to children to protect against the danger of drowning), and the scarab (placed in the linen bandages of mummies over the heart to protect the deceased). Men of rank and authority often carry the *was*, a hooked sceptre or staff that was a sign of control over the forces of chaos.

Warfare in the Desert Kingdom

In the early years of the Desert Kingdom's history, the country's soldiers were part-time fighters who only took up arms when directed by the king. Once the danger had passed, they returned to their civilian lives. However, with the creation of a professional army during the Middle Kingdom period, soldiering became a profession in its own right.

Although soldiers are stationed in every district, the largest concentration of troops are in the northern garrison-town of So, the southern garrison-town of Persekhmet, and the capital city, Sebentos.

The most common weapons used by Khettim soldiers are bows and spears. However, they also make use of daggers, maces and axes for close combat. Swords are regarded as 'foreign' weapons, and are rarely used or encountered in the Desert Kingdom.

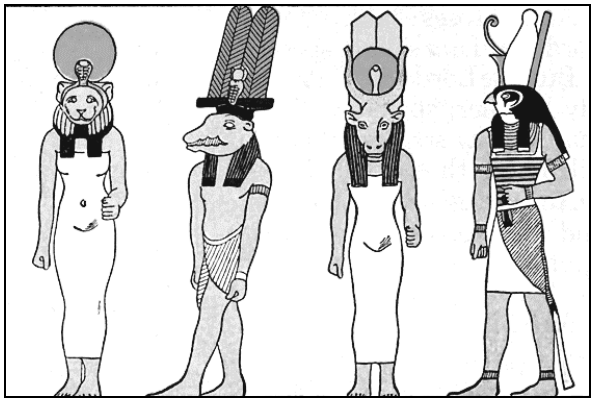
Generally Khettim soldiers are lightly armoured, wearing a leather over-kilt and carrying wooden shields. For centuries the Desert King's armies fought only on foot: however, since the beginning of the New Kingdom, chariots have also been used as part of their tactics (probably imported from the Land of the Sun).

Amongst the most grisly tasks faced by Khettim soldiers was that of cutting off the right hands of dead enemy soldiers. The severed hands were then piled up so that the number of the dead could be counted.

The army is employed in a number of other roles besides that of waging war against the Desert King's enemies. These include guarding trade routes, overseeing the transport of stone for building projects, collecting taxes, even helping with the harvest.

Not all of the Desert King's soldiers are Khettim – from the end of the Old Kingdom onwards, there have been foreign mercenaries within his army. Sometimes these men are prisoners of war, given the option of joining the Desert Kingdom's army or facing execution, whilst others have joined voluntarily.

Other nationalities that can be found alongside the Khettim troops of the Desert Kingdom include Midians, Charybdians, Kandarian mercenaries and even, on occasion, Minean adventurers from the Three Cities.



Four of the thirteen major Khettim deities :

(from left to right) Sekhmet, Sobek, Hathor and Horus

Deities and Religion

The Great Company of the Gods

For most Mineans, the very mention of the animal-headed gods of the Desert Kingdom causes them to laugh and sneer. Menander of Lyrika has written : *'O what bizarre misshapen creatures these are, that have been so elevated in the deluded minds of superstitious men'.* One might expect a more enlightened perspective from one who has such pretensions to scholarship; but such viewpoints are commonly encountered. These simplistic attitudes ignore the very real subtleties of Khettim religious devotion. In my view, one does not have to believe in the strange gods of the Khettim – I certainly do not – to develop a certain respect for their customs, peculiar as they may seem to us.

Each village of the Desert Kingdom has their own local god. These minor deities are typically honoured at small shrines made of mud brick, in which is housed a clay statue of the relevant god. There are dozens of these minor gods and goddesses, each having a different character and role. However, the more important gods are worshipped in large stone temples housing statues of the gods that are usually fashioned in gold and other precious materials.

The exact reason why so many of the gods are depicted as being half-human and half-animal is not one to which I have discovered an entirely satisfactory answer – this does seem to be a matter of peculiar sensitivity to the priests I have questioned on this subject. My own hypothesis is that the custom goes back to the Age of Myth, when the Khettim first encountered a number of non-human races in the Khet valley, such as the Anubians and the Ubasti. Indeed, several deities have clearly been directly borrowed from these non-human races.

Amongst the many gods of the Khettim, only a relatively small number were revered widely. The two most important of these were the sun-god Ra, and the god of darkness Typhon. Both of these gods had widely established cults under the Old Kingdom.

As I have already noted, the rivalry between these cults was directly responsible for the downfall of the First Dynasty. By the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, four more gods had emerged as the foci for major cults. Interestingly, each of these had an association with one of the four primary elements: fire (Set), earth (Hathor), water (Sobek) and air (Horus).

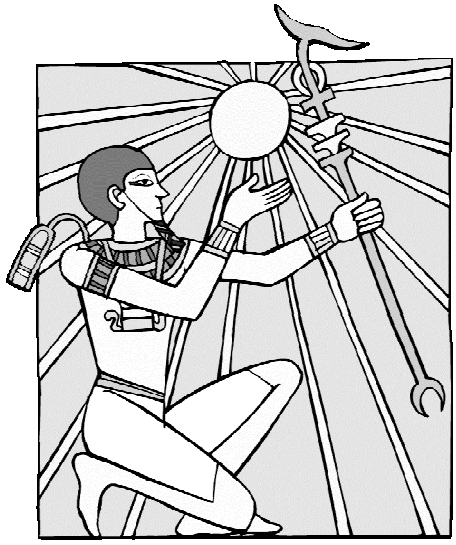
The third stage in the emerging pantheon of the Desert Kingdom came during the course of the Middle Kingdom period, with the elevation of seven further deities (mostly female) to the 'first rank' of major deities. In some cases these new gods were appropriated from neighbouring cultures – in others, they were clearly ancient, minor deities of the Khettim come to new prominence. The seven (often informally known as the *Heptead*) were Bastet, Khnum, Maat, Meretseger, Sekhmet, Taweret and Thoth.

By the end of the Middle Kingdom period, this pantheon of thirteen deities (each except Typhon becoming associated with a particular *nome* or district) had become well-established, and, with one notable exception (see the *Saga of Osiris and Isis* below), the religion of the Khettim appears to have altered little in the past five hundred years.

The following thirteen deities make up 'the Great Company of the Gods':

The two primal gods of light and dark:

Ra or **Re** (the sun-god and god of life), the king of the gods and traditionally the first ruler of the Desert Kingdom, from whom the Desert Kings claim descent as gods on earth. Ra is revered as lord of creation. He ensures the fertility of the soil and escorts dead kings into the underworld. It is believed that each evening he is swallowed by the dark god Typhon, only to be reborn the following morning after travelling through the underworld, and thus bringing life back to the world after each night. Ra is usually represented by the solar disc, sometimes with wings, or (occasionally) as a golden-skinned human figure. His sacred colour (naturally) is gold. In some parts of the Desert Kingdom he is also worshipped under the name **Ptah-Ra**, the speaker of words. As Ptah-Ra he is represented as a man wearing the cap of a scribe. In this guise, his sacred colour is white.



A rare anthropomorphic depiction of Ra the Sun King

Typhon (the god of death, chaos and darkness, the lone god), the lord of the underworld, who fights a never-ending battle with Ra. As a chaos god, he is also associated with the ocean depths. Typhon is generally depicted as a dark-skinned human figure whose face is hidden behind a black mask (it is rumoured that the hidden visage of Typhon is quite inhuman, and quite hideous) – and so his worshippers often refer to him as 'the Hidden One'. His sacred colour is black. Alone of all the gods, he has no kinship with the others – truly, he is the Lone God.

The four gods of the elements:

Set also known as **Sethos** (the god of fire, serpents, and the desert), elder son of Ra and Sekhmet, and half-brother of Horus and Khnum, but usually an ally of Typhon. Set has a deep-seated rivalry with his brother Sobek. Usually depicted as a serpent-headed creature, Set is revered as chief god of the Serpent Folk. His sacred colour is red.

Hathor (the goddess of earth, fertility, love and the moon), the wife of Ra and mother of Horus. Hathor is usually depicted as a cow, or as a beautiful woman with the ears of a cow, often viewed by the Khettim as a loving, gentle creature. Her sacred colours are green and (in her moon-goddess guise) silver.

Sobek (the god of water, crocodiles, and the River Khet), younger son of Ra and Sekhmet, and half-brother of Horus and Khnum. Sobek is always depicted with the head of a crocodile. He is usually considered an ally of Typhon, but possessing a deep-seated rivalry with his elder brother Set. His sacred colour is purple.

Sobek, the Crocodile God of the River Khet

Horus (the god of the air, falcons and the Desert Kings), son of Ra and Hathor, and father of Khnum and Thoth. The falcon-headed sky god is the lieutenant of the sun-god, and the patron god of the Desert Kings, who claimed to be his reincarnation, and who were often depicted with the falcon head of Horus themselves. Horus has a particular enmity for Typhon's lieutenants, his half-brothers Sobek and Set. He is believed to protect households from natural threats, such as lions, crocodiles, snakes and scorpions. He is also the supreme god of the Hawkmen of the South. His sacred colour is blue.

The Khettim Gods & the Olympians

What is the exact relationship between the gods of the Desert Kingdom and the Olympian Gods? In recent years, as Mineans have begun visiting the Desert Kingdom in greater numbers, this has become an ever more vexing question. Three answers are often given:

First, some assert that the Desert Kingdom's gods are false and have no power, authority – or even reality. This, of course, is the most common belief amongst Mineans who honour the Olympians.

Secondly, some believe that the gods of the Desert Kingdom are a rival set of gods, weaker than the Olympians, but with some influence – at least within the bounds of the Desert Kingdom – or, alternatively, very powerful tutelary spirits, worshipped as gods by the various tribes of the Desert Kingdom.

Thirdly, others insist that the Desert Kingdom's gods are the Olympian gods in another guise. Some 'scholars' have made great fools of themselves trying to identify which deity of the Desert Kingdom corresponds to which Olympian. The best-known scheme of identification was drawn by Chrysippus of Malos forty years ago, and included the suggestions that Ares be identified with Sekhmet, and Hera with Tawaret. Even Chrysippus struggled to find counterparts for all the Olympian gods – he couldn't find a Khettim equivalent of Hestia, for instance – but, of course, the many flaws of his scheme should be immediately apparent. Who, for example, honestly believes that Ares would disguise himself as a lioness-headed goddess; or Hera as a hippopotamus? Please!!

The only Olympian gods for whom we can realistically see any parallels in the Khettim pantheon, in my view, are Apollo (corresponding to Ra) and Hermes (corresponding to Thoth). *(Note: it is perhaps surprising that Anagnosis doesn't mention at this point that Chrysippus of Malos was murdered the year after announcing his theories to a scandalised Akademia by a vengeful priestess of Hera – Anaximander)*

It is unlikely that any of these explanations offer a complete picture – and, needless to say, all these views would be regarded as highly distasteful to most god-fearing Khettim. I would caution against too much metaphysical speculation when visiting the Desert Kingdom – it could easily be misconstrued as impiety!

Thoth,the Ibis-headed god of wisdom

The seven holy ones of the Heptead:

Bastet (the cat goddess, goddess of musicians and dancers), younger daughter of Ra and Hathor, and wife and sister of Horus, and usually depicted as a black cat. Bastet is also the supreme goddess of the Ubasti, who see her as a moon goddess. In the myths of the Khettim, she is often depicted as self-serving and fickle in her loyalties, sometimes favouring her father Ra and husband Horus, but sometimes allying herself with Typhon. Her sacred colour is black.

Khnum (the god of fertility, waterfalls, labourers and craftsmen), elder son of Horus and Bastet, and brother of Thoth, is usually depicted as a ram-headed god. The Khettim believe that he decides how much silt is left on the land after each flood, and he is thus worshipped as a fertility god. He is also revered by labourers (who admire his strength), and by craftsmen (especially potters, who use the mud he provides to make their pots). One Khettim creation myth tells that Khnum was the creator of men. His sacred colour is brown.

Maat (the goddess of justice), elder daughter of Ra and Hathor. Maat is usually depicted as a woman with a blue-feathered headdress – the symbol of justice. She is patron goddess of viziers and governors in their role as judges. Her sacred colour is blue.

Meretseger (the guardian of tombs), daughter of Set and Taweret, is the cobra-headed guardian of tombs. She is regarded as the patron of all those who worked on building the tombs of the Desert Kings. Like Set, Meretseger was originally a deity of the Serpent Folk. Her sacred colour is green.

Sekhmet (the goddess of war, disease and fire), lover of Ra, and mother of Sobek and Set. Sekhmet is usually depicted as a lioness. Her sacred colour is red.

Taweret (the goddess of childbirth), daughter of Ra and Sekhmet, wife and sister of Set, and lover and sister of Sobek. Taweret is usually depicted as a female hippopotamus. Originally regarded as a dark goddess, Taweret later came to be revered as essentially beneficent in nature. Her sacred colour is green.

Thoth (god of wisdom and healing), younger son of Horus and Bastet, and brother of Khnum. He is usually depicted with the head of an ibis. As a god of knowledge, he is (with Ptah-Ra) the patron of scribes. His sacred colour is white.

The Saga of Osiris and Isis

The only major addition to the Desert Kingdom pantheon during the current New Kingdom period has been the elevation to divinity of the heroic figures Osiris and Isis.

The *Saga of Osiris and Isis* (first written down during the reign of Menemkhet I about two hundred and fifty years ago, but based on earlier, oral sources) is set during perhaps the most shameful period of Khettim history – the latter part of the Age of Magic, when the Desert Kingdom was divided between powerful foreign empires. In the north, the Autarchs of Typhon ruled; in the south, the Anubian Clans. It was a deeply humiliating time for the Khettim. However, after three generations of foreign rule, in the final years of the Age of Magic a pair of heroic figures emerged as beacons of hope and resistance during dark times – Osiris and Isis.

Osiris was a Khettim prince, who claimed descent through his mother from the First Dynasty of Desert Kings, and through his father from the Second Dynasty. In his youth he was hidden from the servants of the Autarchs. Only on reaching manhood was his true heritage revealed to him. He began an unsuccessful revolt against the Autarchs, and barely escaped with his life. He then fled to the Land of the Sun, where he met and fell in love with the princess Isis, daughter of Benil-pul III, the Wizard-King of Ishtar. Isis was a powerful sorceress in her own right, and eventually persuaded her father to provide aid to Osiris. Together Osiris and Isis marched against the Autarchs of Pstatis. Many Khettim rallied to Osiris' cause, and were entranced by the beauty of his foreign princess – but others, if only out of fear, sided with the Autarchs.

The Immortals : Isis and Osiris

During his twelve years of exile, spent fighting in the Wizard-King's armies, Osiris' military acumen had greatly improved – and his skill, together with the magical aid of Isis, was sufficient to help him win a great victory over the Autarchs. But just as a glorious triumph seemed within his grasp, the chief Autarch of Pstatis, Neimon the Proud, put forth all his powers to summon the god Set. Set challenged Osiris to single combat, and the young prince accepted – and, to the amazement of the few who dared look upon the battle, Osiris' valour and skill was so great that three times he succeeded in hitting Set. But no mortal can ultimately stand against a god. At last, weary and wounded, Osiris succumbed before the envenomed blows of the serpent god. He fell into a swoon, and died in the arms of Isis.

Neimon probably thought that the death of Osiris would mean the end of his rebellion, and victory for the Autarchs – but, if so, he now swiftly realised the error of that judgement. Set, still bleeding from the wounds inflicted upon him by Osiris, turned to the Autarch and, without a word, tore out his windpipe. Then he turned to the few remaining, cowering Autarchs of Pstatis, and instantly struck them dead with a contemptuous, venomous glance. He bowed his head in respect towards Osiris and Isis, and vanished.

'For six days and six nights Isis lay silent, motionless, her beloved clasped tightly to her bosom, and none dared draw nigh unto them, nor could any tell whether Isis lived still. But in truth, her body had fallen into an enchanted sleep, whilst her spirit made the long journey to the Hall of Judgement. Many charms had Isis learnt that aided her on that perilous journey.

Once before the gods, she pleaded before Maat in words more eloquent than Thoth, more passionate than Hathor, more forceful than Horus. Even Set – who speaks with cunning and skill against all mortals brought to judgement – sat in stony silence as Isis made her petition.

'At last, Maat raised her hand: "Enough. The gods have heeded thy prayer. We shall release Osiris, and thou wilt dwell with him in the land of the living – for a time and a season unto men. Then, together, you shall return to us – and take your place amongst the immortals. This is the judgement of the gods."

'Thus, on the seventh day, did Isis open her eyes, and she beheld the sight of her beloved – Osiris – breathing once more, his wounds healed, his life restored. For seven years they reigned together in the Desert Kingdom: a short time of bliss and plenty, for none dared disturbed the peace of the realm in their day.'

It is said that their young son, Horankhor, who had been born in Ishtar, followed Osiris and Isis as king – first ruler of the Third Dynasty of Desert Kings. Whether or not this claim is true, the Third Dynasty rulers adopted Osiris and Isis as personal demigods.

As for the eventual fate or burial place of Osiris and Isis, no tale tells. Their cult grew through the first century of the Age of Heroes, eventually being written down in the reign of Menemkhet I – their supposed great-great-grandson. Menemkhet certainly promoted the cult and, although never counted amongst the Company of the Gods, they have come to be regarded and revered as standing amongst the Immortals.

Creation Myths of the Khettim

The Khettim believe that Ra, the sun-god, spoke the universe into creation from the primordial mound that first rose above the waters of chaos (ruled by Typhon).

At first all was bliss. However, Ra was tricked by a jealous Typhon into entering a dark cave – the entrance to the underworld – plunging the world into darkness. Horus descended into the underworld, fighting with Sobek and Set, Typhon's lieutenants, on the way, before making petition on behalf of his mother Hathor. The price exacted by Typhon for releasing Ra was heavy – Horus was forced to surrender his right eye. In addition, Ra had to agree to the spending of half of his time thereafter in the underworld – a pledge that he has kept ever since.

Many years later, mankind was created by Khnum, the potter-god, on his potter's wheel. It is said that Khnum made mankind in the physical image of Ra (minus the golden skin, of course). They were his second great creation upon his potter's wheel, made after his first – the bull-headed ancestors of the Minotaurs, made in Khnum's own image – offended Ra with their arrogance and bad-temper. According to the Khettim, this shared ancestry (within the designs of Khnum) is the principal reason for the ages-old enmity between Minotaurs and men. Later still, Ra was offended by his human subjects, and ordered Sekhmet, goddess of war, disease and fire, to destroy the human race.

After partially completing this work, whilst the goddess was still wading in human blood, Ra's anger abated – but unable to persuade Sekhmet to desist, he flooded the world with beer, which the goddess drank to such an extent that she forgot about her dreadful mission. This event is still celebrating annually in the three day Festival of Drunkenness.

Another story tells of a quarrel between Ra and Typhon which accounts for the dryness of the Desert Kingdom. According to this Khettim myth, Typhon was originally a god of storms and rains, and had an arrangement with Ra that he would provide the rains and waters, as necessary for plant growth as the warmth and light that Ra supplied. In the early days of the Age of Myth, this balance was respected, and the land about the Khet was rich and verdant for many miles in either direction. But Typhon and Ra quarrelled (it is said because the Lone God was jealous that Khnum had made men in Ra's image, and not Typhon's). Typhon withdrew his blessing of rain, and the lands about the Khet gradually became the desert wastes with which we are now familiar.

The Identity of the Hidden One

Many Minean visitors to the Desert Kingdom have speculated as to the exact appearance of Typhon under his black mask. Cleonthides of Argos has pointed out that the Khettim have a strange ritual, often depicted on temple walls, of the ruling king beginning his reign by killing a hippopotamus with a harpoon. He has therefore concluded – with the kind of amazing leap of logic so typical of his fanciful imagination – that Typhon's true form ***must*** be a hippopotamus!

Much more plausible, in my view, is the hypothesis put forwards by Tryphosa of Seriphos in a flawed but promising first paper delivered at the Akademia last year. This young scholar believes that the true form of the 'Typhonian beast' is related to the strange Charbydian tales of the Hellephaunt – a nightmarish creature of truly demonic aspect.

In truth, this mystery is not likely to be solved any time soon – and, be warned, the priests of Typhon take a very dim view indeed of any 'impious inquiries' into the true visage of the Hidden One!

Unorthodox Cults

Although the vast majority of the Khettim worship 'the Company of the Gods', as well as honouring Osiris and Isis, and a whole host of household and local gods, there are several lesser-known cults within the Desert Kingdom, with less orthodox beliefs (at least in the minds of most Khettim).

One such sect is the 'Cult of the Dark Gods', a sinister group amongst the Khettim who have promoted the worship of the Dark Gods Typhon, Set and Sobek over and above the other members of the kingdom's pantheon. The Cult of the Dark Gods dates back to the Autarch occupation of the Delta – possibly earlier. After the downfall of the Autarchs, the Cult went 'underground' for centuries – but there are persistent rumours that it has become more active in recent times, even that certain high-ranking noble families have become associated with it.

The beliefs and rituals of the Cult of the Dark Gods are reported recorded in a text known as the *Black Scrolls of Madu*. Some believe this document to be fictitious, and my attempts to track it down have, so far, been unsuccessful. Reportedly, it contains an alternative account of creation and the age of mythology which asserts the supremacy of the triad of Dark Gods. All known temples of the Cult of the Dark Gods were destroyed during the reign of Osiris and Isis – but, again, it is rumoured that hidden shrines and temples have been secretly maintained through the centuries.

Membership of the Cult of the Dark Gods is prescribed, and the penalty for belonging to the Cult is severe. However, members can easily pass themselves off as 'ordinary' devotees of Set, Sobek or Typhon – so most Desert Kings seem to be prepared to turn a blind eye to the conduct of the Cult (although it is said that Nebheptah II, the current monarch, has been more watchful for any increase in the Cult's activities).

A rather unimpressive statuette of Typhon which DOES look like a hippo (well, sort of)

More open than the Cult of the Dark Gods are the activities of the 'Order of Light' – a sect that worships the solar-god Aten. Aten is generally equated with Ra (and also, it is believed, Apollo, Mithras and other sun-gods). Most members of the Order seem to regard him as a supreme god, with the other gods treated either as servants of Aten, or as different aspects of his divinity.

The Order of Light is a relatively new religious cult (no more than twenty or thirty years old, perhaps), but it has already gained a surprising number of adherents amongst the upper class. Although not prescribed like the Cult of the Dark Gods, membership of the Order of Light is certainly frowned upon in polite Khettim society – and the persistent rumour that the crown-prince Nakhtankh is sympathetic towards the Order has caused considerable scandal at the royal court.

Other minor cults include the already-mentioned Cult of Sutekh (found in certain southern villages), and the Cult of Selket, goddess of the Scorpion Folk, which has a small following in some parts of the eastern Delta. Cleonthides of Argos has tried to argue that these two gods were at one time worshipped alongside the other lesser gods of the Heptead in a company which he refers to as the *Ennead* – but I have found no evidence whatsoever to substantiate this wild theory!

This other depiction of Typhon ford not really look like a hippo either but is probably closer to the truth…

The Curse of Sutekh

Sutekh, god of the Orycters

… or Set the Serpent in disguise ?

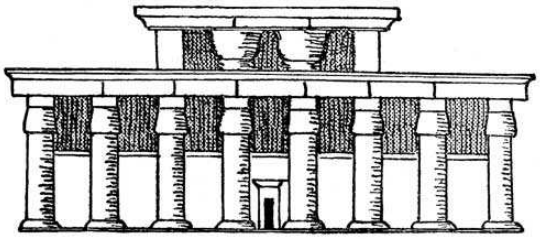
One of the more peculiar animal-headed gods that I have encountered during my travels through the Desert Kingdom was Sutekh, the ancient aardvark-headed god of the Orycters. The Orycters are a strange folk, once possessed of a great empire that held sway over the Desert Kingdom, and perhaps beyond, early in the Mythic Age.

Although the Orycter Empire has long since passed beyond remembrance, their god, Sutekh, is worshipped still in a handful of Khettim villages in the far south of the country. The last of the Orycters are reputed to dwell east of the Mountains of Cadmea, but they have become a reclusive folk, shunning contact with others not of their race.

A Khettim legend tells that Orycter civilisation fell when the aardvark-folk angered their god by boasting of their accomplishments to other races without giving sufficient honour to Sutekh. Sutekh was so angry at their impiety that he placed not one but three curses upon their race. First, he made two out of three of the females of the race barren. Secondly, he cursed the remaining fertile females by ensuring that one in three of their offspring should be misshapen, without limbs and with a long, sinuous body. Thirdly, the Orycters were afflicted by a plague of venomous snakes; even today, it is said that most serpent poisons are extra-effective against them.
As a result, the population of the thrice-cursed Orycters declined precipitously, and their empire succumbed to invasion from other races.

Piecing together various bits of evidence following my first visit to the far south of the Desert Kingdom some seven years ago, I came to the remarkable conclusion that Sutekh is actually the serpent-god Set in another guise. Although my discovery has been pooh-poohed by Cleonthides of Argos, the evidence is quite irrefutable.

(Note: I must point out that few of Anagnosis' colleagues share his confidence in the identification of Set with Sutekh – Anaximander)



Temples of the Desert Kingdom

Regardless of age or dedication, most temples in the Desert Kingdom share the same basic design. Behind a grand entrance (called a *pylon*) there is typically an open courtyard and a second smaller pylon. This opens onto a second courtyard, and then a hall filled with massive columns supporting a roof (a *hypostyle* hall).

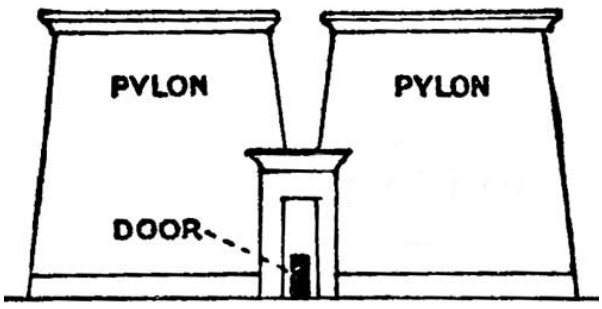
This might open into a smaller hall (a hall of offerings), before reaching the innermost sanctuary in which is kept the sacred statue of the god to whom the temple is dedicated. This statue is usually made of gold – a metal that is held sacred because it is believed that the flesh of the sun god Ra is made of gold. The notable exceptions to this practice are statues of Hathor, which are usually made of silver, and Typhon, which are ***always*** made of ebony.

The various halls and courtyards of the temple are adorned with further statues and paintings of the gods.

Temple complexes consist not only of the central place of worship, but also the neighbouring buildings housing schools, libraries, store-rooms and living quarters for priests, craftsmen and other workmen. One of the most important ancillary buildings is the 'House of Life', where scribes, priests and physicians are educated.

The religious ceremonies that are carried out in the temples of the Desert Kingdom are highly elaborate, and sometimes involve the whole population of the area. At the major ceremonies, the king himself often presides over the proceedings, in which incense, holy water, sacred music and the offering of food and other objects are common features.

Many religious festivals are essentially local in character, but some of them are celebrated throughout the Desert Kingdom. The most important of these are the Festival of the Long Night, celebrated at the winter solstice in all the Temples of Ra and Typhon (though in markedly different ways); and the Great Thanksgiving, the harvest celebration held over the course of the five (sometimes six) intercalary days that end the year.



So now you know all about pylons

Prominent Temples

The grand temple of Horus at Sebentos is not the oldest, but as the site of the chief temple dedicated to Horus, patron god of the Desert Kings, it is arguably the most important in the realm. The great doors of this temple are inlaid with gold and semi-precious stones. The temple reliefs tell the story of Horus' epic fight with the gods Sobek and Set, and his bargaining for the release of his father Ra before the throne of Typhon.

Perhaps the greatest temple in the Desert Kingdom, and probably the oldest still in regular use, is the temple of Ra at Amedfa. The entrance to the temple is flanked by two red granite statues of Neferkaure, second king of the Second Dynasty. At the rear of the temple stands the chapel of Ptah-Ra – the so-called 'ear chapel'. This is in reference to the external walls of this chapel, which are decorated with ear *stelae* – i.e. blocks of stone with ears carved on them. Pilgrims may approach these ears and whisper their prayers and desires into them. It is believed that these prayers go straight into the ears of Ptah-Ra.

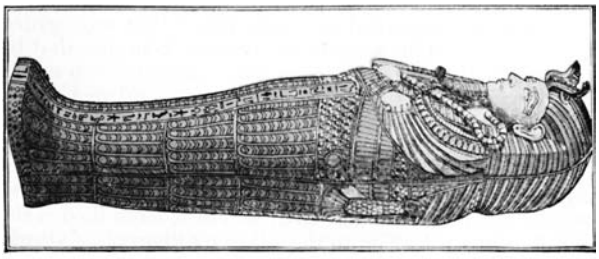
Remarkably, it is said that the god often responds instantaneously to requests – his voice can be heard instructing the pilgrim on what he needs to do in order for his petition to be granted (such as building a chapel or shrine, or dedicating a statue to the god). Sceptics might be tempted to suggest that this 'voice of the god' is nothing more than that of a priest of Ra speaking from the other side of the wall – though it would scarcely be polite to make such a suggestion publicly.

The double-temple of Sobek and Horus at Om-kibor in the far south of the kingdom is most unusual. Built in parallel to one another, with separate entrances from an open courtyard, for most of the year pilgrims to the two temples co-exist quite happily with one another: but for the three days of the Festival of Mocking, pilgrims are encouraged to congregate in the great courtyard, trading insults with one another, and mocking the others' god. On the third day, the climax of the festival, they are even encouraged to thrown stones at the statue of the opposing god (and, as the ceremonies often get out of hand, at each other!).

Often, only the presence of members of the royal guard prevents things from turning into a public riot. This peculiar (not to say hazardous) festival is inspired by a legend with tells of a famous confrontation between the two gods. The rivals challenged one another to a series of contests to prove which was the stronger, the faster and the wiser. Sobek won the first contest, and Horus the second – but different versions of the tale exist as to who turned out to be the wiser god.

Many believe that the most striking temple in the Desert Kingdom today is the beautiful Rose Temple of Hathor at Kebet, so called from the delicate, almost translucent pink quality of the stone used to build it. The temple courts are always filled with the sweetest incense and the most delightful music. The adjacent Garden of Enchantment is held by some to contain some of the most exquisitely-beautiful flowering plants in the known world. The Festival of Perfumes, held over the three days of the first full moon of winter, is the highlight of the year in the district of Kebet.

Other prominent temples in the Desert Kingdom today include the imposing black-granite Temple of Typhon at Pstatis, the austere Temple of Set at So, and the noisy and exuberant Temple of Bastet at Hawada.



Death in the Desert Kingdom

The last part of this essay deals with a subject that is of crucial importance to the Khettim – indeed, is at the very heart of their civilisation – namely their attitude towards death. The Khettim believe that when a person dies, his spirit embarks on a perilous journey to the underworld. It is important that the living do everything possible to ensure that the journey goes well, by preserving the body in the form of a mummy and burying it in a tomb or pyramid with all the things that the spirit might need in the afterlife.

The process of mummification is one that the Khettim are reluctant to explain at any length to outsiders. Nevertheless, I have gleaned some of the more important parts of the process. The whole procedure takes about seventy days, and is carried out by specially-trained embalmers who begin by washing the body with *natron* – a salty solution with antiseptic qualities. Then the internal organs are removed – save for the heart, which the Khettim believe to be the centre of all thought, emotion and intelligence. The body is left to dry, before being packed with sawdust and spices, then wrapped in linen. Special prayers are recited as each part of the body is wrapped, and amulets bearing the names of the deceased are placed amidst the wrappings in order to protect them in the afterlife.

The Hall of Judgement

A key part of Khettim funeral rites is the belief that before the deceased are reborn in the afterlife they enter the Hall of Judgement, presided over by Maat, the goddess of truth and justice. The various gods will speak in favour or against the deceased, with Set usually standing as chief accuser, and Horus standing as chief defender. Hathor is often depicted as standing close by, offering her tears and her prayers for mercy.

Then the deceased's heart is weighed against Maat's feather of truth. If the heart weighs more (a sign of the corruption of sinfulness), it is devoured by the crocodile god Sobek, and the unfortunate individual is condemned to remain within the depths of the underworld – *Duat*, the 'Other World' – under the watchful eye of the heartless Typhon for all eternity. However, if the heart is lighter than the feather, then the deceased will pass from the Hall of Judgement to *Amenti* – the 'Place of Reeds' – to dwell with Ra forever. Whereas Duat is thought of as a place of never-ending darkness and emptiness, Amenti is visualised as an idealised Desert Kingdom – a river bisects this land of plenty, and it is filled with an abundance of vegetation, animals, birds and fish.

Conversations with the Khettim

Certain commonly-used phrases, used in everyday conversation in the Desert Kingdom, may cause surprise, or even alarm, to the unsuspecting visitor. Do not be unduly concerned if someone says *'may you die in your own town'* – this is actually a phrase of respect, not a sinister threat. Nothing is more horrific to the Khettim mind than the thought of dying away from one's own town, family and friends.

Dying away from home, and not being buried properly, with the attendant risks thereby posed to the soul in the afterlife, is something that most Khettim would dread. Similarly, the greeting *'may you live to 120 years'* is a common blessing, as this is regarded as an ideal age.

Do not be surprised if married persons refer to themselves as *'brother'* and *'sister'* – these are common terms of affection, addressed to spouses or lovers as much as to siblings, and does ***not*** mean that the couple actually are brother and sister – indeed, although such relationships are common within the royal family (following the example of the gods), they are not permitted to lesser Khettim.

Finally, please remember that it is considered polite to respond to any mention of the king's name with the words *'life, prosperity and health'* as a sign of respect and goodwill.

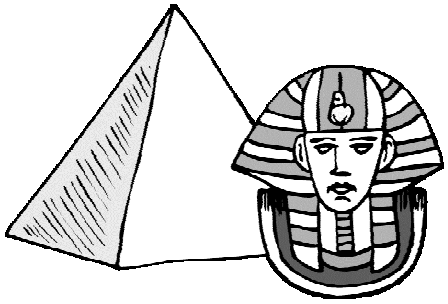
Names amongst the Khettim

A person's name (*ren*) is very important in Khettim belief. It is believed to be as much a part of a person as their body (*ha*), their heart (*ib*), their shadow (*sheut*), their reflection in water, or image (*kheper*), and their spirit (*ka*).

All six components were regarded as making up the whole person – and one's name being forgotten was regarded as a terrible fate, one that would have grave consequences for one's eternal destiny. That was why the names of the deceased were buried with them, but also why the living were encouraged to remember and pray for their deceased ancestors by name.

Not all Khettim names have specific meanings – but very many do. In a society with high infant mortality, it is not surprising that many names reflect anxiety about new-born children, or good wishes for their future health, or character.

Common names therefore include: **Aken** (*joy*), **Ankh** (*life*), **Djoser** (*holy, pious*), **Heset** (*favoured*), **Hetep** (*content*), **Ikher** (*astute*), **Imat** (*gracious*), **Imhotep** (*gracious and content*), **Inu** (*gift*), **Kamose** (*spirited birth*), **Kau** *or* **Khu** (*protected*), **Menem** (*enduring*), **Meri** (*beloved*), **Montu** (*warrior*), **Nakhtankh** (*strong life*), **Nakhti** (*strong*), **Nefer** *or* **Nofret** (*beautiful*), **Neferka** (*beautiful spirit*), **Sekhem** (*wisdom*), **Senbi** (*healthy*), **Setep** (*chosen*), **Shepes** *or* **Shepsut** (*wealthy, dignified*), **Sober** (*mighty*), **User** *or* **Woser** (*powerful*), **Yamose** (*joyful birth*).



Other names invoke a close – often familial – relationship with a god, a king (especially of the first dynasty), or a special, divine place e.g. **Amenteti** (*of the place of reeds,* i.e. the blessed afterlife), **Henemre** (*friend of Ra*), **Hori** (*of Horus*), **Nebethor** (*lady of Horus*), **Nebetra** (*lady of Ra*), **Saamun** (*son of the hidden one*, i.e. Typhon), **Sahathor** (*son of Hathor*), **Sahure** (*son of the day,* i.e. Ra), **Samekhe** (*son of darkness,* i.e. Typhon), **Satadjet** (*daughter of Adjet*, a first dynasty king), **Satipy** (*daughter of Ipy*, a first dynasty king), **Satsobek** (*daughter of Sobek*), **Satmontu** (*daughter of warriors*), **Satwosret** (*daughter of the powerful one*, i.e. a god or king), **Semerhor** (*companion of Horus*), **Senintef** (*man of Intef*, a first dynasty king), **Sensutekh** (*man of Sutekh*), **Senwosret** (*man of the powerful one*), **Setepkhnum** (*chosen of Khnum*), **Seti** (*of Set*), **Shemesre** (*follower of Ra*), **Tawereti** (*of Taweret*) and **Thuti** (*of Thoth*).

A third type involves a pious statement in response to the child's birth, e.g. **Akenre** (*joy of Ra*), **Amunsheut** (*hidden in shadows*, a reference to Typhon), **Bastnefer** (*Bastet is beautiful*), **Hathorsheut** (*shadow of Hathor*), **Heruhor** (*the voice of Horus*), **Heshathor** (*favour of Hathor*), **Hesethor** (*favour of Horus*), **Horankhor** (*Horus is life*), **Horhotep** (*Horus is content*), **Inuptah** (*gift of Ptah*), **Kheperhor** (*image of Horus*), **Khnumnakht** (*Khnum is strong*), **Maahotep** (*Maat is content*), **Merihathor** (*beloved of Hathor*), **Meriptah** (*beloved of Ptah*), **Nebheptah** (*Ptah is lord*), **Neferkaure** (*protected by Ra the beautiful*), **Nefernet** (*the gods are beautiful*), **Nubkaure** (*protected by the lord Ra*), **Ptahhotep** (*Ptah is content*), **Rahenem** (*friend of Ra*), **Ra-neptah** (*Ptah-Ra is god*), **Raheset** (*favour of Ra*), **Rashepes** (*Ra is wealthy*), **Sekhemnet** (*wisdom of the gods*), **Sekhemre** (*wisdom of Ra*), **Sekhemthut** (*wisom of Thoth*), **Setamun** (*Set is hidden/mysterious*), and **Userkafre** (*the powerful spirit of Ra*).

A fourth type recalls an attribute of the River of Kings, or invokes a relationship with the Khet, e.g. **Amunkhet** (*the mysterious Khet*), **Menemkhet** (*the enduring Khet*), **Merikhet** (*the beloved Khet*), **Nebukhet** (*lord of the Khet*), **Neferkhet** (*the beautiful Khet*), **Sakhet** (*son of the Khet*), **Samenkhet** (*son of the enduring Khet*) and **Sobrekhet** (*the mighty Khet*).

Finally, there are those names that have no readily identifiable meaning. These include some of the very oldest names, dating back to the days of the Old Kingdom, e.g. **Adjet**, **Intef**, and **Ipy**, kings of the First Dynasty.

Royal names can readily be identified because of the common practice – dating back to the Old Kingdom – of placing them inside an oval-shaped ring known as a *shenu* ring (an ancient symbol of eternity).

History of the Desert Kingdom

The People of the River

The history of the Desert Kingdom is both ancient and complex, but of one thing there is no doubt – its culture far predates Minean civilisation. Only in the remotest parts of the Land of the Sun, and amongst the mysterious ruins of Proteus, do we find any evidence of human civilisations that are as ancient and venerable as those that dwell still in the Desert Kingdom.

Although some scholars (I think, for example, of Helion of Seriphos) have made, in my view, poorly-evidenced claims for the primacy of Protean culture, I am strongly of the opinion that the very oldest human civilisation is that of the Khettim – 'the People of the River' – the human inhabitants of the Desert Kingdom. *(Note: a warning that this contention of Anagnosis, as he himself would admit, is somewhat controversial – Anaximander)*

In the early part of the Mythic Age of Man, which may have lasted for two or three thousand years – no-one is really sure – the Khettim's ancestors settled in the valley of the Khet. There they lived by hunting animals and fishing, before learning to grow grain and herd domesticated cattle – perhaps a thousand years before the end of the Mythic Age. Around this time they also developed skills in using stone, copper, clay, wood and leather, and established thriving craft industries.

The building of simple papyrus boats promoted links between communities, and enabled traders to travel up and down the River Khet. Villages sprang up along the length of the river, each with their own tribal chief, god, burial customs and artistic styles.

The Khettim Calendar

Since ancient times the Khettim have divided the year into twelve months, each of thirty days. These twelve months are divided into three seasons: Inundation or *akhet* (the time when the Khet is in flood), Winter or *peret* (the time when the sowing takes place), and Summer or *shemu* (the season of harvest). At the end of the year there are five additional intercalary days of celebration, each dedicated to one of the primary gods (minus Typhon). Every fourth year a sixth intercalary day is added, dedicated to the god of chaos.

Unfortunately, as the Khettim spread along the river, they also discovered that they were not the only intelligent beings vying for the rich resources to be found in the Khetian valley. These other races included the Anubians, the Serpent Folk, and the Ubasti. The struggle for survival between these races lasted many generations. Little has survived from this period, except a variety of legends that have been incorporated into the mythologies of the Khettim.

Ultimately, the Khettim – although in many ways the weakest race, at least physically – triumphed over the others. In part, this was due to the Khettim's greater skill at playing off the other races one against another. In particular, the Anubians and Serpent Folk had a deep-seated hatred for one another that the Khettim grew quite adept at exploiting.

The Khettim were also the first of the various races of the Khet valley to be united under a strong king, Adjet the Red, some seven hundred years before the end of the Age of Myth. According to legend, Adjet gained mystic powers after successfully answering the questions put to him by a sphinx.

A Note about Dating

The dating system used in this essay was first developed by Demosthenes of Pylene about ninety years ago. Dates in the Second Age are denoted AM (Age of Magic), whilst those from the current Third Age are denoted AH (Age of Heroes).

Dates from the First Age cannot, of course, be known with any certainty, as no mortal knows how long this era lasted: however, the term BP (Before Prometheos) has sometimes been used to establish a chronology of the First Age – working backwards from the date of Prometheos' giving of magic to mankind.

It is worth noting, however, that the Khettim's own dating system is rather different, and is based on the regnal years of their kings. It is not always possible to make an accurate cross-reference to the commonly-used Minean system.

Most of the dates given in this essay, therefore (until the past century or so), are somewhat approximate.

The First Dynasty & the Old Kingdom

King Adjet was the founder of the First Dynasty, which according to tradition ruled the Desert Kingdom for about five hundred and fifty years.

Most of the seventeen kings that are listed as members of this ruling family during the so-called 'Old Kingdom' period are now little more than names, and today we know almost nothing of the length of their reigns, their precise relationships to one another, or their individual accomplishments.

Some 'scholars' have speculated as to whether or not the First Dynasty ever really existed. Cleonthides of Argos has been particularly dismissive of the King-list of the First Dynasty. I would refer him to my good friend and colleague Anaximander of Cresos, who at the Akademia is very fond of noting that 'nature abhors a vacuum'. If the First Dynasty as recorded didn't exist, something else *must* have – and so it seems better to take at face value the rather scant records of its deeds that remain. Especially as Cleonthides has yet to offer a convincing alternative!

If the accomplishments of the First Dynasty kings were not as well-recorded for posterity as we would like, the fact remains that they were substantial.

All the evidence suggests that during this period, towards the end of the Age of Myth, many of the discoveries that would be instrumental in the development of later society in the Khet valley were first made. They included advanced techniques of irrigation, the development of a solar calendar, the establishment of well-organised government, advances in art and medicine, and - perhaps most important of all - the development of literacy.

The Language of the Gods

During the Old Kingdom, as now, the more frequently-used language of the Khettim was Low Khemi. This is not a written language, but is commonly used in commerce, farming, soldiering and other everyday activity. Less frequently heard is High Khemi, 'the Language of the Gods' – the tongue used at the royal court and by the priesthood.

The peasants that make up the majority of the population understand little or nothing of this language, which is notable for its rich vocabulary, and complex grammar. Only the scribes, nobility and priesthood have a really good grasp of this subtle language.

Unlike Low Khemi, High Khemi has a written form, using a script quite unlike that of any other known language. Many Minean scholars claim to understand this script, but in truth very few have even the slightest inkling of how to translate Khemi inscriptions.

I have devoted much of my adult life to deciphering the script, and learning the language, and I can say with some confidence that I am able to translate more than nine-tenths of the texts with which I am presented – though, occasionally, even I will be faced with a passage that defies satisfactory translation.

Studying the mysteries of High Khei hieroglyphs

Although very few written records from the First Dynasty period have survived, those that have (and I, unlike Cleonthides, have been privileged to see some of them, carefully preserved in the royal archives of Sebentos) testify to the fact that the High Khemi language and its written script were already well-established in these ancient times.

The High Khemi Script

The High Khemi script makes use of a series of symbols known as *hieroglyphs*.

The complexity of the script is caused by the fact that different symbols have different functions.

Some symbols stand for consonants, or groups of consonants; others function as *determinatives* – i.e. as clues to the class and function of the word – and not as sound-markers at all. And a few particularly important symbols actually stand for entire words. Most vowels are left unmarked, making pronunciation difficult for anyone not well-versed in the spoken language.

In all there are something like 700 hieroglyphs in the High Khemi script that are in common use – and a properly-trained scribe is expected to be familiar with them all.

As far as player-characters are concerned, all Khettim Nobles, Priests, Elementalists and Sorcerers are assumed to be fully literate in High Khemi. Outsiders could theoretically learn the High Khemi script, as per the usual rules (see *Maze Masters Guide* p 10) – but only if they have the Scholar background talent.

Famous Khettim Works

Many famous literary works have been produced in the Desert Kingdom over the centuries. They include:

Annals of the Kings: The official record of the Desert Kings from the days of King Adjet onwards. Often reworked by later kings to enhance or denigrate the deeds of their forebears, the Annals need to be treated cautiously as a historical source.

Black Scrolls of Madu: Possibly fictitious work, containing the hidden lore of the Cult of the Dark Gods.

Book of the Dead: One of the oldest works of the Desert Kingdom (parts perhaps going back to the early days of the Old Kingdom, over 1,000 years ago). Also known as the ***Book of Spells for Going Forth by Day***. Not a book for general reading, this rare collection of religious spells is designed to protect the deceased in the afterlife – but may have practical applications in the present life too…

Book of Sorrows: Fragmentary historical work from the dark Days of Lamentations, dating back about 700 years.

Litany of Ra: Work of great piety, the memorisation of which (with its list of the 144 names of Ra) is claimed to aid the passage of the soul through the afterlife. Written perhaps 600 years ago, during the reign of Neferkaure.

Love Songs of Hathor: Composed about 500 years ago (during the reign of Akenre I), a source of great inspiration to poets and lovers through the centuries.

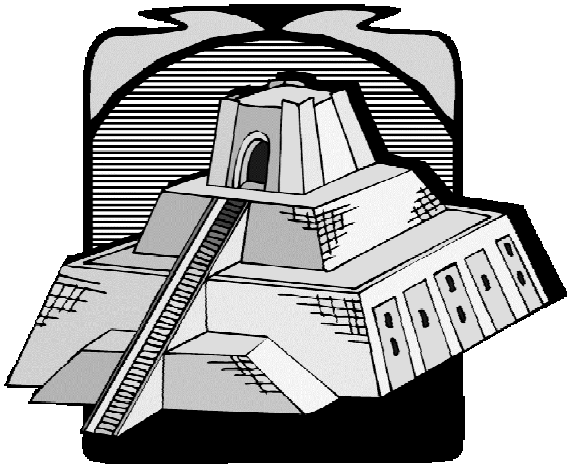
Saga of Osiris and Isis: Part epic, part romance, this was written about 250 years ago (during the reign of Menemkhet I), but based on earlier oral traditions of the heroic demigods Osiris and Isis, who deposed the Autarch rulers of the Delta towards the end of the Age of Magic.

Satire of the Trades: Written almost 500 years ago (during the reign of Akenre II), this satirical text describes the woes of the various professions within the Desert Kingdom.

Tales of Wonder: Written during the reign of Menemkhet I, these five tales are set in the Pyramid Age of the Middle Kingdom.

The Shipwrecked Sailor: A tale of adventure on the high seas where the poor shipwrecked sailor is washed up on a deserted island, with nothing but a giant talking snake for company. Written about 140 years ago, during the reign of Amunkhet I.

The Wisdom of the Gods: Despite the title, this is more of a compilation of pithy advice on correct etiquette for day-to-day living, rather than collected words of wisdom from the lips of the gods. First collected during the reign of Akenre I, some of these epigrams are clearly far older.



A typical mastaba from the Old Kingdom era

The War of the Gods

The first Khettim buried their dead in pits in the desert, where the dry sand would preserve the bodies.

Later, during the Old Kingdom period, wealthier families put their dead in long low tombs that were made of small stones and bricks, called *mastabas*. Some noble tombs from this period have survived to the present, but the whereabouts of the royal tombs of the First Dynasty remains unknown. In all likelihood, the ravages of time have long since taken their toll upon them.

For all their advancements, the religious practice of the peoples of the Old Kingdom was still at a very primitive stage of development. The surviving records suggest that the practice of human sacrifice was quite common during the Old Kingdom period. In addition, each village and township still clung very much to its own local gods, and the idea of an all-encompassing family of gods had not yet developed.

Amongst the kings of the First Dynasty, the two chief gods were Ra (the sun god) and Typhon (the god of death and darkness) but these had not yet established themselves as the paramount gods of all the Khettim.

The struggle for pre-eminence between the gods Ra and Typhon was a direct cause of the fall of the Old Kingdom, about one hundred and fifty years before the end of the Age of Myth. The last two kings of the First Dynasty were brothers: Ra-neptah and Samekhe. Ra-neptah, the elder brother, was a proponent of Ra as supreme god, whereas Samekhe favoured Typhon.

Samekhe usurped the throne of Ra-neptah after only two years, and held it for seven years before his elder brother returned with a hired army from the Land of the Sun. Samekhe, in turn, sought the support of Anubian mercenaries. The battle between the two rivals – often known as 'the War of the Gods' – was long and ruinous; according to one tradition it lasted for forty years! The outcome appears to be that Ra-neptah ultimately triumphed over his brother.

Samekhe the Usurper

There are several competing accounts of Samekhe's fate. One popular tradition was that he was imprisoned by Ra-neptah in the first pyramid, the so-called Black Pyramid (in my view, a later invention, as most records attest to the fact that pyramid-building did not begin until the rise of the Second Dynasty). Another tale claims that Samekhe was betrayed by his Anubian allies, who divided his body into six parts, and scattered them throughout the Desert Kingdom. A third chronicle asserts that he was reconciled to Ra-neptah, and that is why Typhon is still a major god within the pantheon of the Desert Kingdom. Finally, several accounts record that after the final battle Samekhe simply disappeared, vowing to return for his lost throne one day.

Ra-neptah's triumph was short-lived. Within a few years, he was dead, and the Old Kingdom had collapsed, with petty chieftains ruling over individual towns and villages in place of the Desert Kings. The First Dynasty was no more.

The Days of Lamentation

The last one hundred and fifty years or so of the Age of Myth was a time during which the prosperity and cultural achievements of the Old Kingdom became little more than a memory. For most Khettim, it was a struggle to survive during this time of hardship and famine – indeed an inscription on one of the very few tombs that has survived from this era describes how hunger even forced some people in the south of the kingdom to eat their own children.

Conditions in the Desert Kingdom during these so-called 'Days of Lamentations' are hinted at in the fragments of an old text known as the *Book of Sorrows*. The following is an extract from this work, written in the final century of the Age of Myth:

'The land is full of rioters. When the ploughman goes to work he takes a shield with him. The Inundation is disregarded. Agriculture is at a standstill. The cattle roam wild. Everywhere the crops rot. Men lack clothing, spices and oil. Everything is filthy: there is no such thing as clean linen these days. The dead are thrown into the river. People abandon the cities and live in tents. And even our nobility proclaim: "If only we had something to eat!" '

The Second Dynasty

However, the coming of the Age of Magic resulted in a rapid changed in the fortunes of the Desert Kingdom.

In the Three Cities we rightly associate the coming of the Age of Magic with the audacious actions of Prometheos (for which Zeus exacted a frightening vengeance) – but the effects of the Bringer of Magic's daring theft was soon felt far and wide. Some of the very first sorcerers and elementalists of this new age either came from, or settled within, the Desert Kingdom – and with their powerful assistance, a warlord named Nubkaure was able to defeat the other warring chieftains in the Khet Delta, and found the Second Dynasty – the ruling family of the Middle Kingdom. He established his capital at Amedfa, where it remained throughout most of the Middle Kingdom Period.

The Middle Kingdom

The Middle Kingdom was the greatest era in the history of the Desert Kingdom, witnessing spectacular cultural achievements and the extension of Khettim influence far and wide. The power of the Desert Kings was never stronger than it was during this period, and their godlike status was affirmed in the building of the pyramids and other monuments.

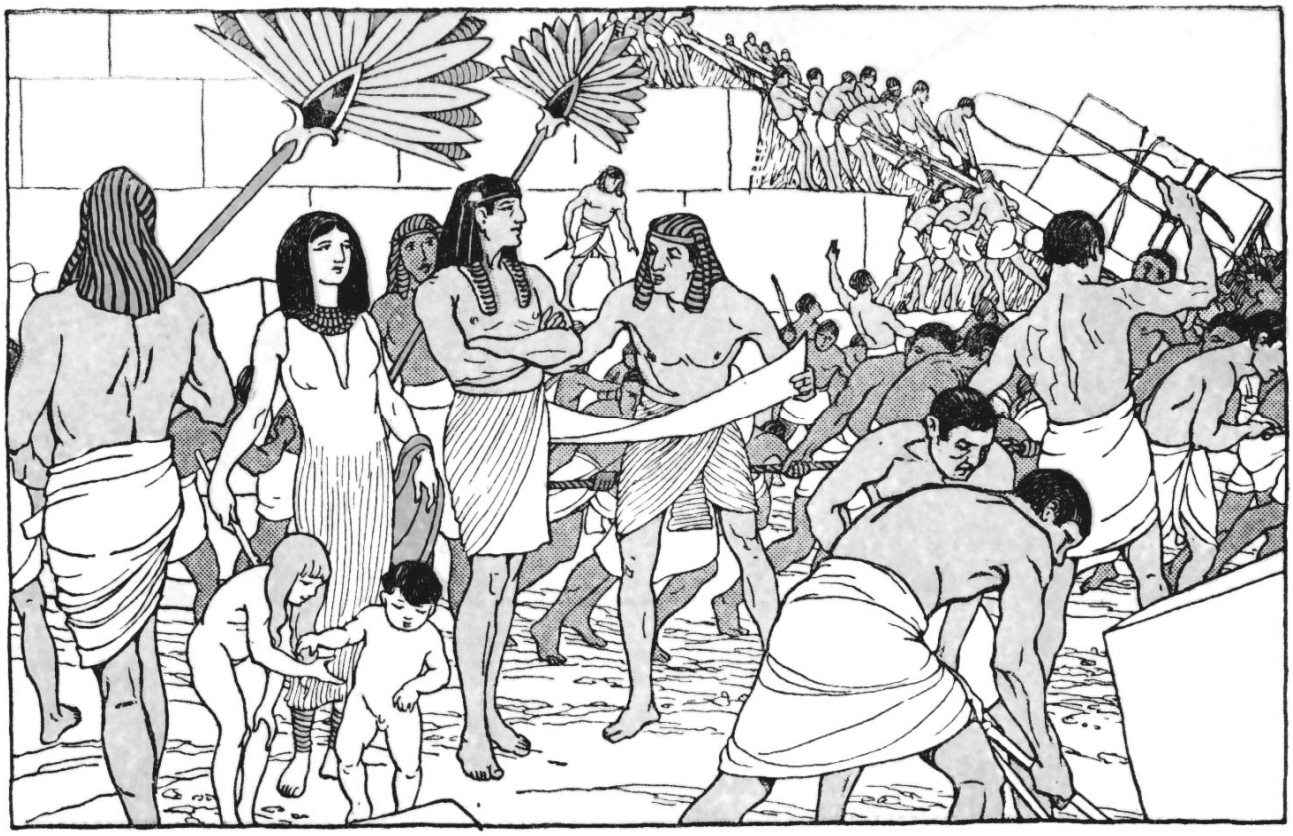
Nubkaure's reign lasted for about twenty years (c.10-30 AM). He was succeeded by his son Neferkaure, whose accomplishments during his forty-year reign (c.30-70 AM) included the expansion of the Middle Kingdom to include the whole valley of the Khet, and the construction of the first pyramid – the so-called Step Pyramid of Neferkaure.

The Age of Pyramids

The most famous monuments of the Desert Kingdom are the pyramids that were built as tombs for the kings of the Second Dynasty.

Nubkaure, the first king of the Middle Kingdom, was buried like his forefathers in a *mastaba*. It was his son, Neferkaure, who built the very first pyramid, the Step Pyramid. It is constructed on six levels (effectively six *mastabas*, one on top of the other) rising to a flat top, the idea being that the spirit of the dead king would ascend the pyramid like a staircase to meet the sun. It was designed as a recreation of the mound of which the sun-god stood when creating the universe.

Neferkaure was succeeded by his son Sahure I, who reigned for about twenty-five years (c.70-95 AM). Sahure built the first true pyramid, which had four smooth sides meeting at a central point. Sahure's pyramid was the first to be cased with gleaming white limestone. His son and successor Userkafre (c.95-132 AM) built the Blue Pyramid, the largest pyramid ever, as well as three smaller pyramids for his two wives and eldest daughter. After Userkafre, pyramid building continued (during the reigns of Akenre I, Akenre II and Sahure II), but on a somewhat more modest scale. Altogether (including Neferkaure) six of the nine kings of the Middle Kingdom were buried in pyramids, and another eleven were built for various queens, princes and princesses.



The Blue Pyramid of Userkafre

The Blue Pyramid of Userkafre was the largest pyramid ever built, and with, it is commonly believed, the most complex interior layout, consisting of six labyrinthine levels. No tomb-robber has ever successfully penetrated the Blue Pyramid – unlike most of the other pyramids built during the Middle Kingdom. It is said to have taken twenty-five years to complete. So-called because of the unusual blue-white sheen of the limestone used to encase it, the Blue Pyramid (and the three smaller pyramids built nearby for his wives and daughter) marks the most impressive necropolis in the Desert Kingdom. Despite this impressive legacy, and his considerable military skills, Usekafre had a reputation as a terrible tyrant. In the *Tales of Wonder*, written in the early New Kingdom period, Userkafre is portrayed as spoilt and lecherous, demanding that he be entertained by twenty naked women rowing him on the pleasure lake of his palace. Another story claims that in order to pay for his daughter's pyramid, he put her to work first as a prostitute.

Each of the four sides of the true pyramid were identified by the priests of the Desert Kingdom with one of the four primary elements – fire, earth, water and air – and their patron gods, Set, Hathor, Sobek and Horus. The base of the pyramid was identified with chaos and darkness, the primeval state of existence, and its patron god, Typhon. The apex of the pyramid was identified with order and light, the ideal state of existence governed by the sun-god Ra. Thus, the pyramid came to represent the perfect balance between the principal gods of the Desert Kingdom pantheon, and the elements they embraced.

Building each pyramid involved the efforts of thousands of workers over many years. The first task was to find suitable building materials and to transport them to the building site. The Khettim quarried limestone, sandstone and granite blocks, took them across the Khet on barges, and then carried them overland on sleds pulled by large teams of men (sometimes across distances of 300 miles!). The pyramids themselves were constructed by means of a huge ramp of earth up which the stone blocks were dragged on rollers, before being levered into position. When one layer was finished the ramp was extended to begin the next.

*(Note: Though Anagnosis makes no mention of it, I understand that Cleonthides of Argos has argued the sheer impossibility of the pyramidal stone blocks being carried so far overland. Cleonthides believes that they **must** have been carried down river for most of their journey – Anaximander)*

Deep within the structure of each pyramid was a network of passages connecting the burial and treasure chambers. Most pyramids also contained false passages, empty chambers and intricate traps, designed to defeat tomb robbers. Burial chambers within pyramids and other tombs varied from the highly elaborate to the relatively plain in terms of design or decoration. The dead were usually buried with household objects which were believed to be of use to them in the afterlife.

The Desert Empire

Under the kings of the Second Dynasty, the Desert Kingdom entered a golden age of expansion and prosperity. Sahure I, towards the end of his reign, established his absolute authority by expelling the elite

band of sorcerers and necromancers – descendants of those first magicians who had aided his grandfather Nubkaure. They went on to found the Stygian Empire in the depths beneath the Mountains of Doom, where they nursed an implacable hatred of the Desert Kingdom.

Sahure's successor Userkafre expanded the rule of the Desert Kings by conquering Midia (c.110 AM), and led the first expedition into the Land of the Sun. Although largely unsuccessful, this marked the first time that a Desert King had campaigned personally beyond the confines of the Khet valley.

Userkafre's son and successor Akenre I (c.132-155 AM) was a rather more successful campaigner – on his third expedition into the Land of the Sun, he captured Kandaria (c.145 AM) and even, briefly, besieged Ishtar before a serious outbreak of sickness amongst his army forced his retreat. Akenre also campaigned successfully against the Anubians, and even sent an expedition from Midia into Charybdis – although without resulting in any lasting effects. He also found time to oversee the construction of seven royal pyramids, including his own – far more than any other Desert King (though none were as impressive as the famous Blue Pyramid of his father). In many ways, Akenre's reign was the high-water mark of the Middle Kingdom.

Akenre I was succeeded by his son, Akenre II. An indolent king, the long reign of Akenre II (c.155-200 AM) saw the Middle Kingdom enter a period of slow decline. Three pyramids were built during Akenre's reign (one for himself and two for his chief wives), but all were of poor construction – all three had collapsed within a hundred years of being built.

Towards the end of his reign, Kandaria regained its independence, and the Anubians re-emerged as a threat on the southern frontier.

The Middle Kingdom - Decline & Fall

Akenre II was succeeded by his elder son Akenre III, but within six months, he had been assassinated by his younger brother, Sahure II.

Sahure refused his brother the trappings of a royal burial – some annals even claim, shockingly, that he had his body thrown to the crocodiles (though other records deny this).

Sahure reigned for nine years (c.200-209 AM). During his increasingly unstable reign, Midia successfully revolted, the Khet Delta was occupied by the Autarchy of Typhon, and Amedfa was sacked.

Only one small pyramid was built during his reign, for himself – it was the last to be built in the Desert Kingdom, and perhaps the first to be ransacked.

Following the fall of Amedfa, Sahure himself was overthrown in a palace revolution, and his infant son Sekhemre was placed on the throne. He reigned for just six years (c.209-215 AM) from the southern city of Keshtor, during which time the Autarchs of Typhon tightened their grip over the Delta. In the year 215 AM, Keshtor fell before a joint invading army from the Stygian Empire and the Anubian Clans.

An Anubian Prince of the Middle Kingdom era

The fleeing Sekhemre was poisoned by his own vizier, Merihenem (whose name, ironically, means 'beloved friend'), and buried in a borrowed noble grave. With the death of Sekhemre, the line of the Second Dynasty came to an inglorious end.

The Divided Kingdom

For almost a hundred years, the Desert Kingdom remained partitioned between foreign powers. In the north, the Autarchs of Typhon held sway, ruling from the sea-port of Pstatis (which they constructed) as far as Sebentos, until the collapse of their Empire at the end of the Age of Magic. Under their occupation, their patron god, Typhon, was to become for a time the paramount god of the northern Khettim. Several impressive temples to Typhon were built in this period, and all other gods (including Ra) were made subservient to him.

In the south, the Anubians and Stygians quickly quarrelled over the division of the spoils, and after a short war, the Anubians expelled their erstwhile allies. Thereafter the southern provinces of the Desert Kingdom remained under the control of Anubian princes, almost without interlude, until well into the Age of Heroes. The Anubians introduced their paramount god Anubis to the Khettim.

The precise identity of Anubis remains something of a mystery. Cleonthides of Argos has suggested that the Anubians equated him with Typhon as a god of death and darkness – an extremely unlikely hypothesis, in my opinion (like most of Cleonthides' ideas).

Pantheos of Skonnos has put forward a rather more interesting, alternative theory that the Anubians worshipped Anubis as a mythic demigod and ancestor of their race. Although several temples to Anubis were built, the worship of this jackal-headed god never caught on amongst the Khettim.

Anubis, the mysterious god of the Anubians

The Reign of Osiris and Isis

The last decade of the Age of Magic saw an extraordinary renaissance of splendour and prosperity under the rule of Osiris and Isis, heroic figures who were later deified by the kings who claimed descent from them (for more details of these remarkable figures, see the *Saga of Osiris and Isis*, excerpts of which are given later in this essay). During their brief but glorious reign (293-300 AM), the Autarchs of Typhon were driven from the Delta, and the Anubians retreated to their city of Wepwawet in the far south.

The Third Dynasty

The passing of Osiris and Isis at the end of the Age of Magic resulted in the Anubians re-asserting their control in the southern provinces. However, the nomes of the Lower and Middle Khet remained under native rule, under a dynasty that was initially based at Pstatis.

The first three rulers of this Third Dynasty (Horankhor I, II and III, each ruling for about twenty-five years apiece) were shadowy figures, who struggled to establish their authority over the northern nobility, and who were buried in *mastabas* just outside their capital.

The Lost City of Wepwawet

The Anubian occupation of the southern provinces is as bitterly-remembered there as the Autarch dominion in the north. The Anubians reigned from a great fortress-city that they named Wepwawet.

It is said that in its heyday, this city was greater in size than the cities of Amedfa and Pstatis combined.

Yet such was the hatred felt for the Anubians by the Khettim that after the fall of the city, edicts were passed forbidding the Khettim from ever entering its silent courtyards. In time, even the location of the accursed city was forgotten, and it is presumed lost beneath the desert sands. Of course, quite an industry has developed over the years in 'secret maps' to Wepwawet, 'the fabulous city of Anubis'…

It was not until the fourth king, Menemkhet I (c.75-120 AH), that the Khettim finally expelled the Anubians, tore down the temples of Anubis, and found themselves united once more under a single king. The New Kingdom had begun.

The New Kingdom

Having united the realm, Menemkhet built a new capital for himself at Sebentos, strategically located half-way along the River Khet (and allegedly on the site of the birth of Osiris, whose cult was greatly-promoted by Menemkhet). Menemkhet was also the first king to the buried in a new location – commonly known as the Hidden Valley. Menemkhet was well-aware that the tombs of many of his predecessors had been plundered by tomb-robbers following the collapse of the Middle Kingdom, and he was determined that this should not be his fate. He therefore spent many years looking for a new location for his tomb, before finding a secluded valley somewhere in the Hills of Brass.

Every Desert King since Menemkhet's time has been buried in this Hidden Valley. The secret of its location has been preserved because of the practice – initiated by Menemkhet – of only allowing mute slaves to work on the king's tomb, who are executed as soon as the work is completed.

Under Menemkhet's next two successors, his son Nebheptah I (c.120-160 AH) and grandson Setamun I (c.160-190 AH), the Desert Kingdom flourished economically – but they were cautious kings, who by and large avoided entanglements with other nations. Setamun's son and successor, Amunkhet I (c.190-225 AH) was very different. Following the example of Akenre I of the Middle Kingdom, Amunkhet led several expeditions into the Land of the Sun, and also into Midia. The expeditions into the Land of the Sun were without lasting result, but his campaign into Midia (215 AH) – following the collapse of the Tritonian Empire that had held sway there for nearly a century – was rather more successful. Once again Midia fell under Khettim dominion.

Amunkhet – uniquely for a Desert King – then set about building a substantial fleet, with the help of the conquered Midians, which briefly threatened the Three Cities. However, a joint action of Minean navies off the isle of Seriphos despatched this fleet in 223 AH, and was followed by the burning of Pstatis the next year, forever ending any hopes that the Desert Kingdom might have entertained of becoming a serious naval power. The king died the next year, a broken man.

Amunket I, the would-be King of the Sea

Amunkhet's successor, his son Setamun II (225-244 AH), was a weak ruler and a poor military tactician. Several fruitless expeditions against the Anubians were made during his reign. He is also remembered as a king who angered the Ubasti and tried to drive them – unsuccessfully – from their oasis enclaves. His failure – unusually – to sire a male heir led to further instability during the latter part of his reign. However, much to the surprise and consternation of his courtiers, in his final year he declared his daughter, Nofret, his heir.

The young Queen Nofret's reign (244-259 AH) may have begun inauspiciously – but it turned out to be surprisingly effective. Abandoning the fruitless and incompetent policy of confrontation employed by her father, Nofret instead concentrated on developing trade routes with the Desert Kingdoms neighbours.

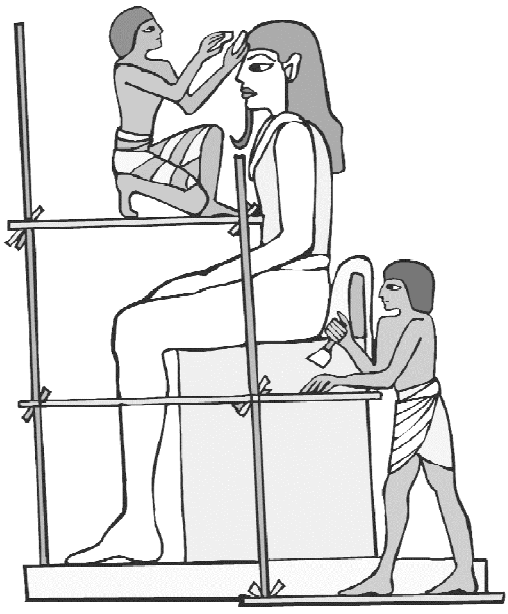
Yet despite her peaceful foreign policy, she ruled the Desert Kingdom itself with an iron grip, constantly on the lookout for conspiracies against her. Her refusal to marry allowed her to retain a firm grip over her realm – but also resulted in a succession crisis following her death.

Civil War

Following Nofret's death, two challengers vied for the throne – Amunkhet II and Sobrekhet, both descendants of Menemkhet I and distant cousins of Nofret.

Amunkhet established himself at the ancient capital of Amedfa, and gained control over the Delta, whilst Sobrekhet held Sebentos and the southern part of the realm. The war between the two rivals lasted for six years (259-265 AH), and greatly drained the country's resources.

During this period, Midia was able to re-establish its independence, which it has retained ever since. Eventually, Sobrekhet succeeded in defeating his rival, and establishing his rule over the whole kingdom. He ruled the Desert Kingdom for another eight years – as a somewhat unpopular and oppressive king – before being assassinated in a palace coup that resulted in his sole son, Menemkhet II, ascending to the throne.



Nebheptah II, current monarch of the Desert Kingdom

Recent History

Menemkhet II (273-294 AM) and his son and successor Menemkhet III (294-330 AM) were conservative kings who maintained an isolationist policy with regard to their neighbours. During their reigns there were a few minor skirmishes with the Land of the Sun and the Anubian Clans, but otherwise their reigns were noted for a rather oppressive stability.

Little that was new or innovative took place in the arts, literature of medicine, in contrast to earlier rulers of the Third Dynasty like Menemkhet I, Amunkhet I and Nofret. Trade with other nations was strictly regulated, and few Mineans were allowed to visit the Desert Kingdom – and then only as far as Pstatis. All this changed with the accession of Nebheptah II in 330 AH as the fourteenth king of Third Dynasty. In the ten years of his reign, Nebheptah has followed a progressive policy of opening up the kingdom to outsiders to an extent not seen for centuries. In this he has been supported by his son, Prince Nakhtankh – a young man who has, remarkably, travelled to other lands, and is said to have an enlightened view of other cultures.

However, it is no secret that Nebheptah's younger brother Sekhemnet opposes the king's policies – just as it is well known that Menemkhet III would have preferred to leave the crown to his younger son. It is whispered that he only named his elder son as heir to please his beloved chief wife Amenteti, the mother of Nebheptah. Amenteti, as queen mother, continues to exercise considerable influence in the realm.

Conclusion

There is much more, of course, that could be said about the wonders of the Desert Kingdom. However, I hope that this short introduction will give the reader some insight into the mind, beliefs and mannerisms of this enigmatic yet beguiling race. Of course, it can be no substitute for the direct experience of life in the Land of the Desert Kings – but perhaps it may encourage a few to seek out the rich rewards to be found in visiting this wondrous kingdom for themselves. I guarantee that you will not be disappointed!

Anagnosis of Thena

HEROES OF THE DESERT

Creating Desert Kingdom Characters for **Mazes & Minotaurs**

by **Olivier Legrand** and **Andrew Pearce**

Khettim Spearman

Classes

Adventurers from the Desert Kingdom do not have access to all the classes detailed in the *Players Manual*. The classes that are not available to them are those which were directly inspired by Greek myth, namely Amazon, Centaur, Lyrist and Nymph.

This leaves us with three warrior classes (Barbarian, Noble and Spearman), three magician classes (Elementalist, Priest and Sorcerer) and the two specialist classes of Hunter and Thief.

The Archer specialist class (detailed in the *M&M Companion*) would also work well in this setting, the bow being one of the primary weapons of its armed forces, as noted in this issue's *Mythika Gazetteer*.

Warriors

In this setting, **Barbarians** are not Hyperborean warriors but black-skinned Charybdians. As noted in this issue's Gazetteer, Charybdian warriors are often found serving as mercenaries in Khettim armies. In game terms, their abilities are exactly the same as those of northern Barbarians.

Desert Kingdom **Nobles** are Khettim warriors of noble (or sometimes even royal) blood, just like their Minean counterparts. Most of them claim some degree of parentage with Isis or Osiris, the patron demigods of the Royal Dynasty, but never actually claim to descend from one of the « true » deities ; unlike the Olympians, the Desert Kingdom gods have no history of mingling with mortals.

Like in most other civilized nations, **Spearmen** are the elite soldiers of Desert Kingdom armies. Unlike Spearmen from the Three Cities, Khettim Spearmen do not practice the Shield Wall maneuver and do not fight in armor (only with spear and shield). Aside from these differences, Desert Kingdom Spearmen have the same class requirements and special abilities as regular M&M Spearmen.

Magicians

Elementalists are perhaps more common - or, to put it more properly, *less rare* - in the Desert Kingdom than in the Minean city-states. As a matter of fact, many scholarly sources seem to suggest that Elemental magic was originally developed by Khettim mages - but this is often said of Sorcery as well, so who knows ? Whatever the truth, Khettim Elementalists have easier access to the elements of Light and Darkness (see the *M&M Companion*) than their Minean counterparts ; indeed, most Khettim Elementalists tend to select one of these two forces as their secondary element (and most of the non-Khettim Elementalists who do master one of these two forces have actually studied in the Desert Kingdom or under the tutelage of a Khettim master).

Priests from the Desert Kingdom must serve one of the thirteen deities who belong to the Great Company of the Gods (see this issue's *Mythika Gazetteer* for more details). Osiris and Isis do not have any real cult, since they are regarded more as immortal demigods than as true deities (but this might change in the future… who knows ?). Khettim priesthood follows the same gender principles as in Minean culture : all male gods are served by male Priests, while goddesses are served by Priestesses. See *Divine Prodigies for Desert Deities* next page for more details about their powers.

Like Elementalists, **Sorcerers** are not as rare as in the Desert Kingdom as they tend to be in other nations and do not suffer any form of social stigma in Khettim society ; indeed, they are often regarded as highly-esteemed scholars and students of the human mind (rather than as psychic manipulators).

Divine Prodigies for Desert Kingdom Deities

Deity	Divine Blessings	Divine Gift
Ra	Danger Evasion Defense Class Mystic Fortitude Personal Charisma	Presence
Typhon	Danger Evasion Mystic Fortitude Physical Vigor	Stealth *
Set	Danger Evasion Mystic Fortitude Personal Charisma	Presence
Hathor	Mystic Fortitude Physical Vigor Personal Charisma	Endurance
Sobek	Danger Evasion Mystic Fortitude Personal Charisma	Endurance
Horus	Danger Evasion Defense Class Mystic Fortitude Personal Charisma	Victory
Bastet	Danger Evasion Mystic Fortitude Personal Charisma	Stealth *
Khnum	Mystic Fortitude Physical Vigor Defense Class	Strength
Maat	Danger Evasion Mystic Fortitude Personal Charisma	Presence
Meretseger	Danger Evasion Mystic Fortitude Physical Vigor	Stealth *
Sekhmet	Defense Class Melee Physical Vigor	Victory
Taweret	Danger Evasion Mystic Fortitude Physical Vigor	Endurance
Thoth	Danger Evasion Mystic Fortitude Personal Charisma	Wisdom *

* These two new, exotic Divine Gifts follow the same rules and restrictions as the ones described in the *Players Manual* (the Priest must call out his deity's name, effects only last for a number of rounds equal to the Priest's Spiritual Aura etc). See next page for a description of their effects.

Exotic Divine Gifts

Stealth : The character automatically succeed at his stealth rolls, regardless of his actual Encumbrance total, and all detection rolls made against him automatically fail.

Wisdom : The character automatically succeed at detection rolls (regardless of the actual target number) and lore rolls made to identify mythic items (see *Maze Masters Guide* p 49).

Khettim Sorcerers believe Sorcery was actually invented in their kingdom by Thoth, the Khettim god of knowledge and wisdom.

It should also be noted that there is no feminine predominance among Khettim Sorcerers – in other words, male Sorcerers from the Desert Kingdom do not start at an older age than Sorceresses.

Character Options

Divine Agents

For mysterious reasons known only to themselves, the deities of the Desert Kingdoms do not use Divine Agents to further their personal agendas in the mortal world ; generally speaking, they seem to be far less prone to games of intrigue and petty rivalries than the Olympian gods.

Background Talents

If the optional rule on Background Talents detailed in the *M&M Companion* are used, adventurers from the Desert Kingdom usually have a narrower choice of background talents than regular *Mazes & Minotaurs* characters, reflecting the specific (and often quite rigid) aspects of Khettim culture and society.

That being said, some of them will also have access to two new, Desert Kingdom-specific talents : *Desert Scout* and *Tomb Robber*, which are detailed below.

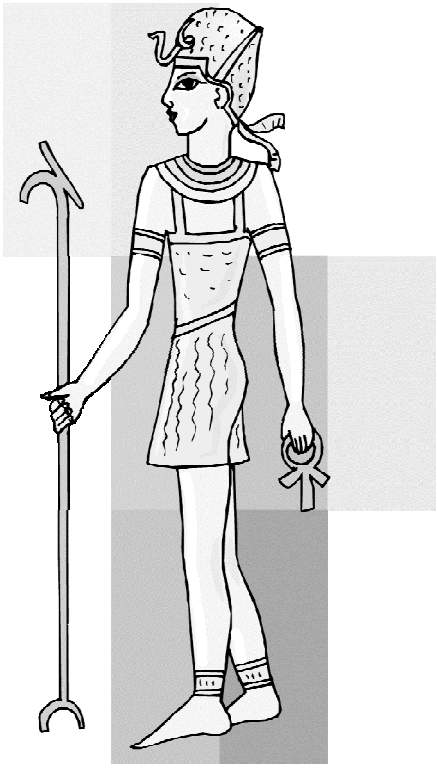
New Background Talents

Desert Scout

This new talent works as the *Woodsman* talent but applies to the desert environment.

Tomb Robber

This unique talent has gained Khettim Thieves a reputation as expert maze delvers and trap finders. It advantages the character on all detection rolls made while exploring tombs, pyramids, labyrinths and underground complexes.



A slender Khettim Sorceress with her mysterious mythic items

Archer : All Desert Kingdom Archers qualify as Bowyers and Desert Scouts.

Barbarian : All Charybdian Barbarians qualify as Woodsmen (in their native jungles) and must choose their second talent among Beastmaster, Desert Scout and Wrestler.

Elementalist : All Khettim Elementalists qualify as Scholars and Healers.

Hunter : All Khetim Hunters are Desert Scouts and must choose their second talent among Beastmaster, Bowyer and Healer.

Noble : Choose two among Equestrian (mainly for charioteering), Musician, Orator, Scholar, Desert Scout and Tactician.

Priest : A Priest's choice of talents varies according to his deity (see below).

Sorcerer : All Khettim Sorcerers qualify as Scholars and Healers.

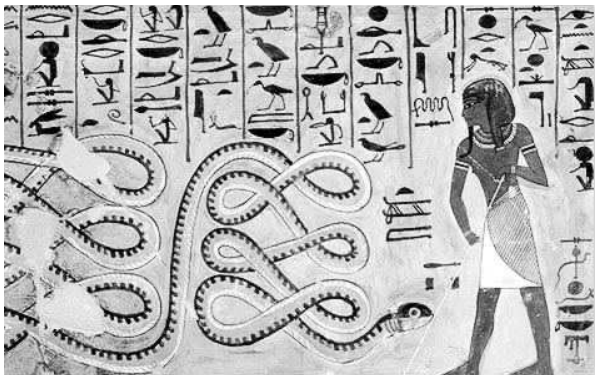
Spearman : Choose two talents among Desert Scout, Healer, Tactician and Wrestler.

Thief : Most Khettim Thieves will have the Tomb Robber background talent, in addition to one of the usual background talents for their class.

Olivier Legrand & Andrew Pearce (2008)

THE ISLAND OF APOPHIS

A pulpish Desert Kingdom scenario for low-level adventurers, by **Peter Larsson**



An ancient image of Apophis

The Delta of the River Khet is the great wetland of the Desert Kingdom, teeming with life and creeping with death. Deep in its wilderness lies an island the very name of which fills the common folk of the region with dread and despair: it is the Island of Apophis.

This remote strip of land is the site of the sinister cult of a terrible monster: the great dragon Apophis. The cultists of Apophis levy an inhuman tax on the farmers and fishermen of the region: human victims to feed the insatiable glut of the monster. The characters must save the unfortunate victims, and if possible to bring down the cult and vanquish the scaly horror.

The Plot in Short

The ancient temple-island of Apophis has become the home of a murderous cult. But these evil priests are but a front for a group of Serpent Men who are infiltrating this part of the Delta. These cunning old lizards have brought in an ancient, giant reptile to be venerated as Apophis himself. They have reinstated the old and evil Cult of Apophis, and these human dupes are now filling the belly of the ravenous flesh-eating monster with human sacrifices under the misapprehension that they are satisfying the divine hunger of the dragon Apophis.

The player characters are contacted by a wealthy Minean merchant (see below), Khettim officials or relatives of those abducted by the cult. When the player characters arrive, there is a small group of victims held prisoners on the island grounds, waiting to be sacrificed. The characters can explore the islands and partake of its riches, rescue the innocent unfortunates, destroy the wicked cult, kill the monster and expose or exterminate the Serpent Men.

The initial motivator for the player characters to visit the island is most likely to save the sacrificial victims. Unfortunately, only half of these can be easily found. The others have hidden deep beneath an ancient tomb on the island, among the Serpent Folk's tunnels. This group obviously includes any individuals the player characters have specifically set out to save.

The Cultists of Apophis

Since time immemorial the superstitious peasantry of the Khet delta have submissively worshipped the snake Apophis: great beast of Set. The ancient island of Apophis, a pre-human site carved with serpentine symbols, has long been a considered a divine and evil sanctum of the dragon god. It is known as a holy place to members of the Cult of the Dark Gods. When the nefarious Serpent Men arrived at the site, they took advantage of these primitive beliefs to create a following of devotees: the cult of Apophis. The Serpent Men brought a giant reptilian horror from some remote corner of Mythika to serve as focus of the cult, and as Apophis incarnate. Brutalized human cultists now scour the countryside for victims to fill the belly of the insatiable beast. The cult is led by the devious Grand Master Sufut, one of the Serpent Men in disguise, and his cowardly helper Mebek. Many of the lesser cultists are locals of fanatical or grim disposition who may know relatively little about the real history of the cult.

The Serpent Men

Long ago, the Serpent Men ruled the world. Now they are nothing but a paltry remnant of their former glory. Scattered groups work tirelessly to reassert their influence in Mythika and over the soft-fleshed humans. The group at the island of Apophis rediscovered one of the ancient, serpentine temples of their ancestors, now a place of worship for superstitious humans. Learning about the local belief in the dragon Apophis, they saw a golden opportunity to establish a façade for their operations, and a means to spread their influence within the Desert Kingdom. They recruited some local thugs and brought a giant reptile to play the part of the dragon. With the peasantry in fear and submission, they are watching their powerbase grow day by day, rubbing their scaly, clawed hands with delight.

The Adventure Begins

The adventurers may be hired by the wealthy and aged Minean merchant Nikos Rhinotomos, whose young and foolish nephew Agapios disappeared during a trading mission to the Desert Kingdom. He was last heard of leaving the city of Hawada. The merchant will reward the adventurers handsomely if they manage to save his poor nephew. The characters may meet Nikos in any Minean city and you can play out the trip to Hawada, or they could meet in Hawada or any part of the Desert Kingdom. Nikos travels the seas in his luxurious barge Oikoumenakton, and will receive them lavishly onboard. One of the abductees could also be a friend or relative of the adventurers, giving them ample cause for action. Give the characters time to plan and prepare for their expedition. The natural starting point for the scenario is the city of Hawada, the settlement that is closest to the island, but the characters can also make similar preparations in any other major Khettim settlement.

Starting in Hawada

The island of Apophis lies close to the city of Hawada. The player-characters can use this city as a starting point, to do research and to stock up on supplies. There are three key places to visit in Hawada: the Provincial Palace, the Temple of Ra and the Markets.

The Provincial Palace is an impressive stone building with massive pylons and endless rows of pillars. A wailing and chest-pounding crowd of supplicants has gathered in its courtyards, all very eager to tell the characters of relatives and friends lost to the cult.

The Palace itself is a drab and officious building where a shrivelled official, the scribe Tothmosis, will receive the characters. If he can be convinced of their quality he will exhort them to save the lost villagers, and promise a generous reward. He may also mutter, "I hope you do better then the last group." He will provide the characters with an antique map to the island. If the player -characters require goods to barter with, they may exchange 7 silver coins (sp) for the native weights of copper (deben, see this issue's *Mythika Gazetteer*)

The Temple of Ra is a small and unassuming temple tucked away behind the massive temple of Bastet. If the characters state that they intend to slay Apophis they will be received by the High Priest, who will promise them many blessings in the name of Ra if they succeed. He will hand them a translation of the book *"The Hero's Guide to Vanquishing Apophis."* He can also provide them with an old map to the island.

The markets are a bustling collection of bazaars, shop-littered streets and open air markets. Anything (and anyone) can be bartered for. The markets work through bartering, and there is no real currency. The player characters may use their negotiating skills and any valuables in their possession for the best possible deal. See this issue's *Gazetteer* as well as the list below for some of the items the characters can get a hold of.

At the Local Market

Items	Cost **(deben)**
Bottle of Cobra Spit Venom	1
Crocodile-hunting harpoon	3
Meat Cleaver	1
Feeble Chains (will snap)	2
Massive Chains (may hold the monster)	9
Crocodile-skin Boots	2
Raft	2
River-boat	45
Amulet of protection *	2

* ***Note to the Maze Master :*** *These so-called amulets of protection have no real magical power. Their snake-like shape is reminiscent of the Amulets of Set (see p 36) worn by the Serpent Men of the cult.*

The Hero's Guide to Banishing Apophis

This richly illustrated book is written in Khettim hieroglyphs. Most of it seems to be in the form of mystic incantations. There is also a translation to Minean.

"To slay the hideous serpent, the Hero must:

–Spit Upon Apophis
–Trample Apophis
–Impale Apophis
–Lay chains upon Apophis
–Cut up the body of the dragon
–Burn the body of the dragon

If the Hero has done all these deeds, the Dragon Apophis will be banished from this world, and the soul of the Hero elevated!!"

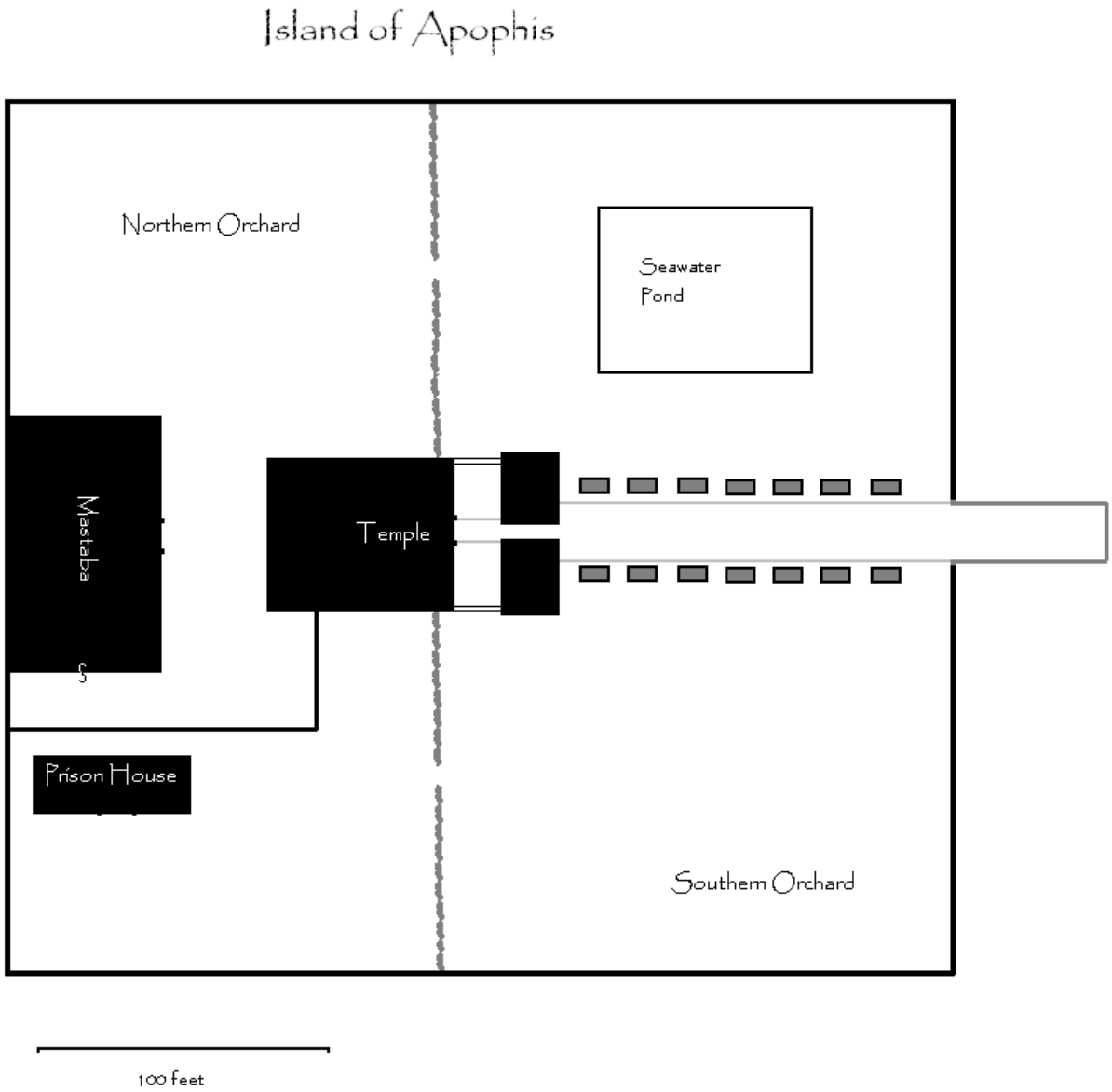
Obviously, these instructions are useless against the mundane monster, but they might make the player characters acquire some useful items.

Journey to the Island of Apophis

After receiving directions (or an old map from Nikos or the High Priest of Ra), the characters can set off in one of the ubiquitous riverboats that navigate the rivulets and marshes of the Delta. They will travel through thick papyrus reeds, and under burgeoning branches. The journey from So to the Island of Apophis takes six hours by riverboat (or 10 hours by raft), and takes the player-characters into increasingly hostile waters. Use the Random Encounter Chart below to determine what challenges they come across hour by hour for the last two to five hours.

1d6	Random Encounter
1-2	Attacked by River Crocodile (see this issue's *Mythic Bestiary*).
3	Hungry hippo alert ! Attacked by a ravenous Hippopotamus (see this issue's *Bestiary*).
4	Finds colorful fruit. Eat at own peril: Physical Vigor saving roll vs. a target number of 15. Painful death in 1d6 rounds if it fails).
5	Comes upon the ruins of a few hovels. If they enter the little island with the hovels they will be accosted by (number of player-characters in the party + 1d6) Bandits who live there. If defeated and interrogated, the bandits can confirm the direction to the Island of Apophis. The hovels show signs of having been smashed in the distant past. If questioned, surviving bandits can tell that legend has it that this little village was once destroyed by the evil snake-god Apophis.
6	Nestled in the branches of a withered tree rests an ancient skeleton. Around its neck hangs an amulet of protection aimed specifically at Apophis and which is, of course, completely useless against the monster.

After some hours of travel the player characters finally push through the shrubbery and unto a patch of empty black water in the middle of which lies the island.



The Island

The Island of Apophis is a perfect square centred on the temple of Apophis – an ancient construction of some pre-human, serpentine civilization. From the water you can clearly see the main building with its massive pylons, the garden walls, and some of the greenery as well as the statues that fill the gardens and the ceremonial approach. The water around the island is deep and black. Along its shores a dozen or so river crocodiles rest. Characters who fail to sneak past will attract two or three of them.

The main approach to the island is a worn stone jetty that is the continuation of the ceremonial parade that leads up to the Temple. The rest of the island is fenced by a high garden wall, at the foot of which are only a few feet of crocodile-infested land. Dexterous player-characters with grappling hooks can try to climb it.

The Jetty and the Temple Parade

A simple slab of stone makes do as jetty for anchoring boats. There are always two riverboats anchored here for use by the cultists. The player characters might want to sink these. If they enter this way they will not be challenged, but the great bronze gates to the Outer Court of the temple will ominously swing shut.

The Temple Parade is a cobbled road lined by low walls on which an unbroken succession of lizard-faced sphinx-statues rest. These freak statues are just inanimate stone, but one of them has hollows instead of eyes. A perceptive player-character will notice someone peeking out of these cavities – and those eyes are not human. The characters can easily walk between the statues to enter either the Eastern or Western Garden.

The Eastern Garden

The northern part of the Eastern Garden is an open lawn, hemmed in by the island's walls and hedges to the south. 1D6 Cultist Thugs are always stationed here on guard duty. The southern part contains a blockhouse guarded by two sentries. The building is a prison holding 15 emaciated prisoners. These unfortunate souls can provide a firsthand account of activities on the island. They can inform the characters that 10 prisoners have managed to escape (including any NPC the adventurers might be looking for). They were going to go for the relative safety of the old Tomb. If further questioned, the prisoners can offer the following clues:

–"The cultists carry trays of solid gold laden with myrrh and precious spices. Their wealth is supposed to be enormous."

–"The Grand Master is a cold, inhuman fellow who sends shivers down the spines of the stoutest men. Most of the other cultists are just licentious thugs."

–"Sometimes you can hear the rumbling roar of Apophis. It is deep and heavy like an earthquake, and it shakes the ground."

–"Another group of adventurers arrived before you. They went into the Temple complex, but we haven't seen or heard anything of them since."

The Prisoners' Tale

"Every few days, the gongs start. Then there is a terrible wait before the evil cultists burst in and snatch one of us. They drag the victim to the temple, and he never returns.

I have heard that the dread Dragon Apophis himself arises from watery depths to devour the poor unfortunate's body and soul.

All we can do is wait our turn."

The Western Garden

The northern half of the garden is dominated by a stonework seawater pond, where river crocodiles lie lazily in the sun. Characters must proceed with stealth to avoid being attacked by the hungry reptiles. The salt-water pond is a handy exit to the sea, three swimming rolls are required to make it to the outside waters.

A hedge separates the northern from the southern part of the Garden. The southern half opens up on to the old Tomb. As the characters enter the garden they can glimpse a dark and shadowy figure sneaking around the corner of the Tomb. It is Mebek the Craven. If the characters manage to catch up with him they can bully him into giving up clues. If he manages to escape he will try to make his way to his room in the Inner Temple.

The Temple of Apophis

The Outer Courtyard

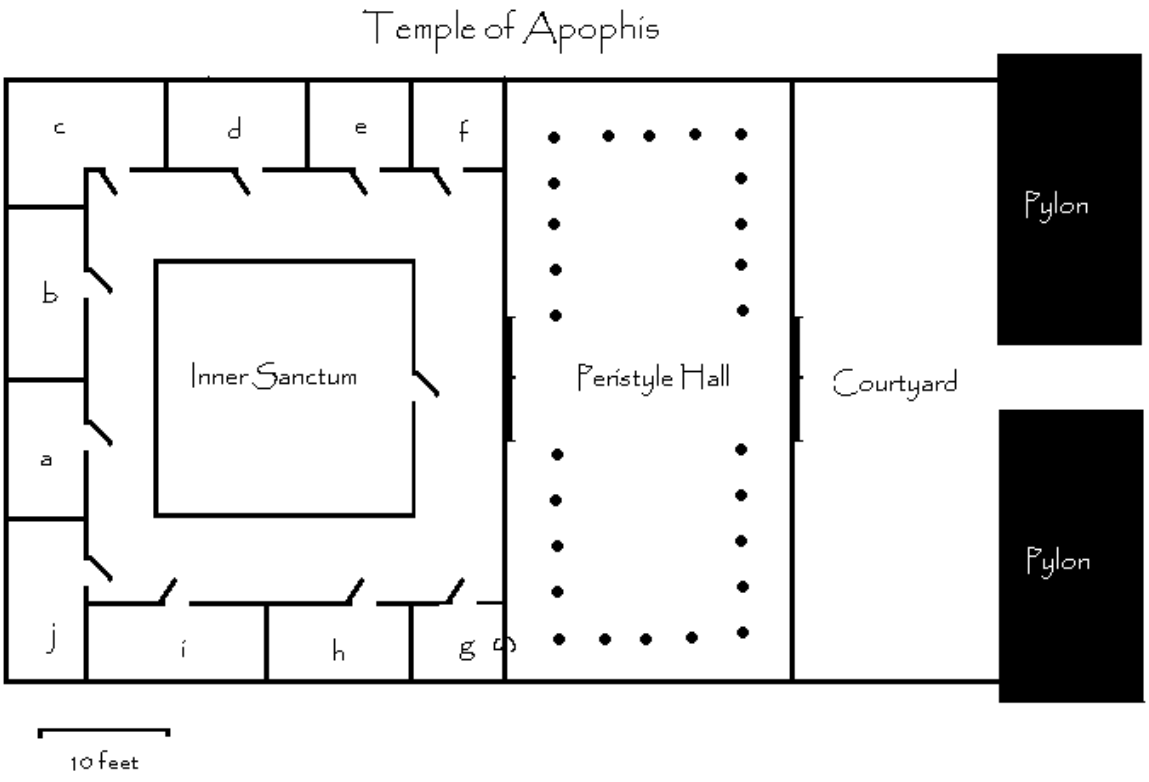
This is an open, cobbled area dominated by the massive pylons. Faint rusty bloodstains on the cobbles should alert the players to the dangers they face. Massive, double bronze doors lead on to the next room of the temple. The walls are adorned with faded paintings representing a massive snake. Hieroglyphs adorn the walls. Characters who can read High Khemi can decipher the following fragments:

"…And Set put the snake of Apophis upon the land of wicked men, and it wreaked great havoc."

"Apophis smote the city walls with the strength of a hundred bulls."

"Set did not lay his hand upon Apophis, but released him into the winds to plague the sleep of sinner, liars and those who...."

Nothing more can be read. If the characters landed by the jetty, the courtyard will be full of armed Cultist Thugs (characters in the party + 1d6), and the great bronze doors leading to the peristyle chamber will be closed. They require a Feat of Strength (or a key) to open.



The Peristyle Chamber

This is an immaculately swept chamber occupied by two or three Cultist Thugs and one Inner Circle Cultist. The left- and right-hand walls are decorated with wall paintings of a black-faced man rising from the seas to the left, and of a lizard-faced man fighting with some pharaonic figure to the right. They portray Typhon, Seth and Osiris, respectively. A giant bronze gong with a padded club sits on a raised platform. A Cultist Thug will attempt to strike it when the player characters enter. They have two rounds to intercept him. If he succeeds (or if the player characters strike the gong themselves) 2d6 Cultist Thugs will come rushing out through the stone doors, deactivating the domino trap.

If the characters investigate the north wall, a successful perception roll (target number 18) will reveal a secret door that leads to room G in the Inner Temple.

The stone doors that lead to the next chamber are decorated with a scene of collapsing pillars and rooftops, and the hieroglyphs for “Death” and “Landslide”. The doors have clearly not been in use for a very long time, and are crusted shut. They are operated by two door handles shaped as snakes biting their own tails – and can be opened only by a Feat of Strength. If the doors are opened from the Peristyle Chamber a disastrous mechanism is set in motion, by which the pillars come tumbling down one after the other. The player characters can avoid being crushed by the falling pillars (2d6 damage) through a successful Danger Evasion roll, but will still be hit by pieces of ceiling (1d6 damage). Once the debris has subsided 2d6 Cultist Thugs will come rushing through the remnants of the north wall.

Inner Temple

The Inner Temple surrounds the Inner Sanctum, and consists of one corridor which opens up to 9 lesser Chambers. Two or three Cultist Thugs patrol this area.

Rooms A

Each small chamber contains four bunk beds. Two Cultist Thugs are sleeping here and will wake if attacked.

Room B

A storage room with amphorae full of food. Three black earthen jars contain dried spiders, bugs and flies for the consumption of the Serpent Men.

Room C

An ornate chamber with painted walls. A reading pulpit basks in the sunlight shining through a single window. The scrolls that litter the floor and the pulpit are full of weird scratchings, nothing like any written language the player characters know of. It is the alphabet of the Serpent Men. A Serpent Man of the Inner Circle (in human guise) is studying the text. He will try to talk and magic his way out of the situation. Note that he wears an Amulet of Set, which may be mistaken for one of the so-called “talismans of protection” sold in Hawada.

Room D

A messy private bedchamber with a single bed and a large wardrobe. A small amphora contains four doses of the Ointment of Meretseger (see this issue’s *Pandora’s Box*). There is a stash of valuables (worth 70 sp) hidden under the floor of the wardrobe. This is the bedchamber of Mebek, who knows the location of the stash, and can be bullied to reveal it.

Rooms E, F, G

A small chamber with four bunk beds. 1d6 armed Cultist Thugs in each room. In room G a door leads to the Peristyle Chamber.

Room H

The bedchamber of the Inner Circle Cultists, bedecked with ornate pillows. There is an ingrained, acrid stench. One Inner Circle Cultist loiters here. He will rush into the Inner Sanctum in case of a commotion. Shed snake scales litter the floor and a clay tablet full of weird scratchy letters lies on a pulpit

Room I

The Great Chamber of the Grand Master, a murky study with blackened chests. The drawers are empty except for a few parchment sheets with the same scratchy scribblings as in Room F. If the Grand Master hasn't been confronted in the Inner Sanctum, he awaits the player-characters here.

Room J

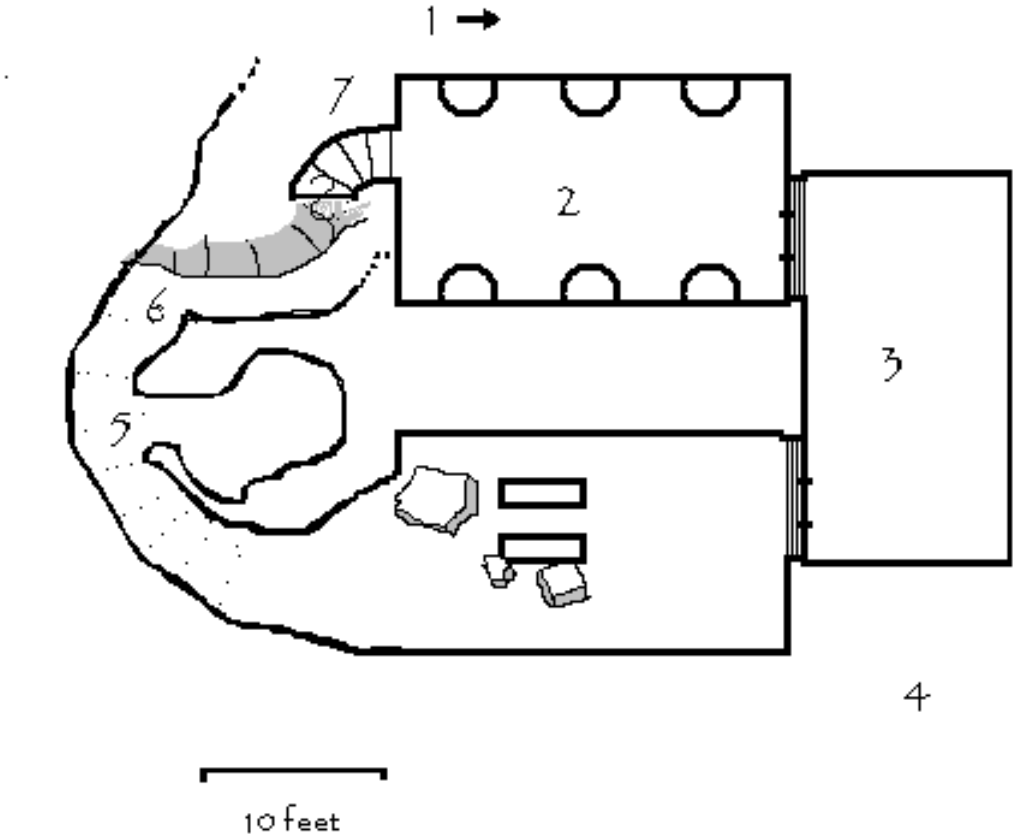
A room full of jars and chests. These jars are brimming with spices, myrrh and incense to a value of 10gc. A stack of books contains numerous spiritual texts including *“Vanquishing Apophis.”*

Inner Sanctum

This is a large ceremonial room where an abyss opens up to the great snake Apophis. Bronze shields over the abyss to reflect the image of the “god,” distorted visions of horror. The back wall of the Sanctum is lined with defaced statues of humanoids in ancient Khettim garb. Each statue clutches a functional bronze axe. When the player-characters burst into the room, the unarmed Cultists will rush for these weapons, taking one turn to reach and seize them. When closely examined, the statues appear inhuman, with scaly, clawed hands. Someone has taken the time and pains to chisel off the faces of the statues, making them impossible to identify.

If the characters wish to make their descent into the abyss they will encounter insurmountable difficulties. The monster can easily reach anyone who tries to descend with its frightful jaws. If they try to fire at the beast they can score one hit or two, only for the reptile to retreat deep into the cavern and out of sight.

Enemies: 1d6 Cultist Thugs, and the Grand Master Sufut unless he has already been encountered. Through the abyss the player characters can catch a glimpse of the tooth-ridden maw of “Apophis.”



The Tomb

An ancient mastaba tomb dominates the back garden behind the temple. The symmetric pattern of its heavy bricks on the north wall is broken by a shallow portal that holds the main stone door. Along the western facade there is a secret trapdoor that leads to the chamber behind the false entrance.

1) The False Entrance

The stone door leads to a tiny chamber dominated by a shrine and altar covered by decaying lotus flowers. Miniscule serpentine figurines in black clay are carefully propped up on the altar. They are so worn out by time that it is difficult to make out their features. There are no further passageways from this chamber, which is a place of worship and remembrance only. On the walls are inscribed in hieroglyphs the names of 74 successive Grand Masters of Apophis. Any character with an understanding of High Khemi script can clearly tell that the writing is ancient and outdated except for the recent addition *Sufut*.

2) Trapdoor and the First Chamber

Description: The trapdoor can be spotted on a perception roll (target number = 15). Alternate ways to get through include interrogating Mebek or sheer strength. The trapdoor opens up into a corridor-like chamber, with walls lined with six upright sarcophagi in traditional Desert Kingdom fashion. The walls behind the coffins are decorated with serpentine hieroglyphs. The far end of the chamber is dominated by a massive stone slab door that will take great force to budge.

Attentive player characters can notice breathing holes in the last pair of sarcophagi, as well as eye-holes. The massive stone door can be broken down with a successful Feat of Strength (which will automatically warn the Serpent Men in the next chamber).

Enemies: As the characters proceed down the hallway, the last two sarcophagi burst open, and the characters are attacked by two silent, empty-eyed Mineans. These unfortunate adventurers have been enslaved by the sorcery of the Serpent Men. One of them is the Amazon Retia and the other a well-armed Minean soldier. They will fight to the death.

Treasure: The sarcophagi, decorated with gold and intricate artwork, are works of art in their own right. They are difficult to transport, and impossible to sell in the Desert Kingdom. If destroyed and melted down the metal value of the ornament is 1d6 gp per sarcophagus.

3) Chamber of the Serpent Men

Description: The stone door opens up into the main chamber of the Serpent Men. The floor is cluttered with shed scales and the room has an acrid smell. The room is lit by heavy wax candles. At the far end another stone slab door has been broken down, and there are gaps large enough for any human-sized character to squeeze through.

Enemies: One of the Serpent Men guards this chamber at all times. He controls two ensorcelled Minean adventurers who will defend him. He will try to escape deeper into the tunnels.

Choose your own Apophis (warning : these pictures are NOT to scale)

Treasure: Clay tablets are stacked to one side, engraved with the thin, scratchy and unintelligible letters of the Serpent Folk. Two of the tablets contain maps to locations in Charybdia – seeds for further adventures? A Sword of Sekhmet (See this issue's *Pandora's Box*) hangs on the wall.

4) The Collapsed Chamber

The western wall of this chamber has been smashed, exposing a large cavity that leads on to a subterranean limestone cave. Part of the roof has also collapsed, and the room is a shambles of broken pottery and crushed valuables. In its center are the remains of two great sarcophagi.

Enemies: Though the room appears empty, there is a **Giant Rat** (see the *Creature Compendium,* p 47) hiding behind a collapsed stone slab.

A few more recent items are stacked against one wall: great wickerwork hampers full of dried exotic fruits, and one sealed clay urn. Any well-travelled or Charybdian character will recognize the fruits as Charybdian. The sealed urn contains a slumbering Giant Snake.

5) Main Tunnel and the Chambers

A rough, natural stone tunnel winds deeper down into the rock foundation of the island. There is a natural cave to the right, where one to three swamp-dwelling Giant Rats nest. They will barge into the main tunnel as the adventurers approach.

6) The Great Cavern

The tunnel opens up into a massive cavern, a natural platform from which a ridge runs along the right-hand wall, just wide enough to walk along. The great cavern extends far inwards and downwards. In its middle the characters can see a massive, scaly, hulking mass: the monster itself! A rope ladder hangs from the platform whereby the characters can descend to the floor of the cavern without being attacked by the reptile. Once the enemies have been defeated, the characters will be hailed by the furtive fugitives, who are hiding at the far end of the ridge. They dare not try to spring across as long as Apophis is there.

Enemies: The platform is guarded by the Barbarian Kloviz and the two last Minean adventurers. Initially they will have their backs turned to the -characters. One of the Serpent Men is hiding in the right-hand corner. His death will break the spell over those present. The monster 'Apophis' is chained to one wall and cannot reach the platform, but anyone who steps on to the ledge will be attacked.

7) The Floor of the Cavern

From here the characters can clearly see the hulking beast. It doesn't resemble the more serpentine pictures of Apophis that the characters might already have seen. With its massive head and tiny arms it looks like some freakish monstrosity, and the massive chains that hold it to one of the walls should tell the characters that this is clearly not the half-deity they were expecting.

Enemies: The dragon Apophis (see *The Nature of the Beast*, next page) must somehow be subdued or defeated; otherwise it will be free to attack those on the ledge, whereas they are unable to strike back in hand-to-hand combat. It can only be successfully engaged on the floor of the cave.

Treasure: The remains of the great reptile's victims lay scattered together with offerings. Every minute the player characters spend digging through the rotting remains they will be able to salvage 1d6 gp worth of valuables, up to a total of 180 sp.

The Nature of the Beast

What manner of creature is the reptile masquerading as Apophis? The Maze Master may use any monster depending on his personal taste and the demands of his campaign. There is a number of different reptilian creatures the Serpent Men might have secreted to the island of Apophis.

For a powerful group the enemy might be a massive **Gigantosaur** (*Creature Compendium*, p 50), straight from the steaming jungles of Charybdia. A more modest (but still formidable) option might be the **Tyrannosaurus** (*Creature Compendium*, p 121). Those who favor a more mythological or mystical approach might wish to confront the adventurers with a **Stygian Serpent** (*Creature Compendium*, p 112), hungry for human flesh, or even an albino **Royal Crocodile** (see this issue's *Mythic Bestiary*), stolen from the Sons of Sobek.

Regardless of its actual nature, the beast will be massive, ferocious and launch itself on any two-legged meal in sight…

Aftermath

Once Apophis has been killed, the player-characters must make their way off the island. As they emerge from the tomb with the rescued prisoners in tow, they will hear shouting and running.

The Cultist Thugs are released from the influence of the Serpent Folk and have realised that their "god" is dead. They are now racing down towards the boats to leave the island as quickly as possible. To contest them the adventurers must race down the piers, and fight off half a dozen thugs that are trying to leave the characters stranded. If the Cultist Thugs succeed, the characters will have to spend a few days on the island with no means of transport, improvising to feed the starving rescued victims. The Maze Master may eventually decide to save them through another party of adventurers come to investigate the island (who will demand a fair share of the treasures found, as well as any reward), or may leave them to their fate.

Rewards

The player-characters will receive at least 30 gold coins from Nikos if they manage to save his nephew Agapios. Warriors will receive 10 Glory each per victim rescued, and per ensorcelled adventurer saved. Magicians will receive 30 Wisdom each if they study the clay tablets in Chamber 3 in the Tomb or the books in Room J in the Temple. If the PCs spoke to the High Priest of Ra, they may also receive a reward of a silver scarab amulet each for saving the unfortunate victims.

Finally, every warrior in the group will receive an extra 100 Glory each if they put an end to the cult, subdue or kill the reptile and manage to make it off the island without help from outside.

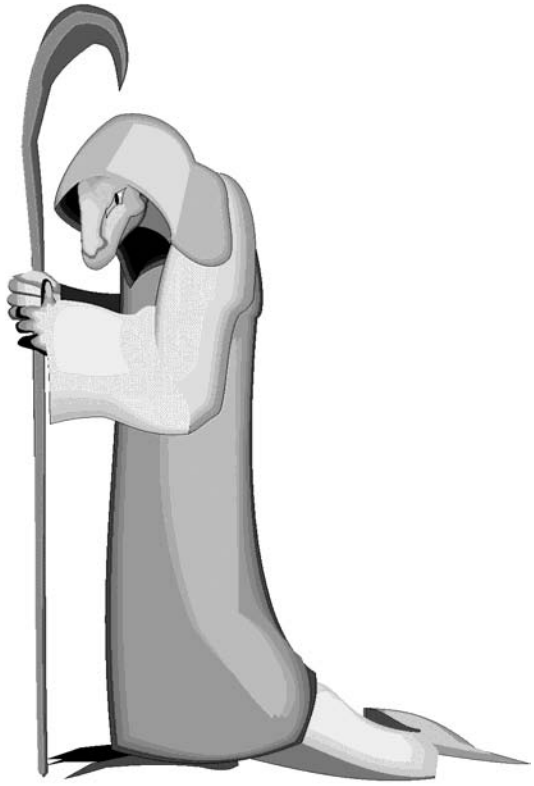
NPCs & Creatures

Inner Circle Priests

The clone-like, detached priests of the Inner Circle all wear long, hooded cowls. They are really Serpent Men (*Creature Compendium*, p 102) who wear magical amulets (see *Amulets of Set*, below) that make them look human In death, they return to their ophidian form. Most of the time, they lurk in the caverns beneath the Tomb, the nest of the Serpent Folk. They speak in low, whispering voices, and tend to goad the lesser priests or ensorcelled slaves on like cattle. When confronted, they will try to flee, using their Psychic Powers to confuse and trick the adventurers.

Cultist Thugs

These brain-washed bullies are ruffians and drifters who have been lured into the cult and magically domineered to follow the commands of the Inner Circle and the Grand Master without question. Many of them are sadists pure and simple, and they are always ready for a scuffle, especially in the name of their beloved cult. They are clean-shaven, muscular, and covered with tattoos, often with serpentine themes and symbols of Set. They have the same statistics as Bandits (see *Creature Compendium*, p 59, replace bows with slings).



The devious Sufut, Grand Master of the Cult of Apophis

The Grand Master, Sufut

The callous, scheming Grand Master is the mastermind behind the entire operation at the island of Apophis. He is actually one of the Serpent Men, masquerading as human. He speaks in a cold, imperious voice that commands instant respect and obedience among his followers, and has yellow, hypnotic eyes. Like all the other Serpent cultists, he wears an Amulet of Set which allows him to pass for human (see below). When cornered by armed adventurers bent on his destruction, he will shed his disguise to devote his sorcerous powers to combat. Sufut is an extremely ancient and powerful Serpent Man and a divine agent of the evil ophidian god Set (also known as Sethos). He has the same stats as other Serpent Men, except that his special connection to Sethos has granted him the additional special ability of *Magic Resistance* as well as an extra rank of Ferocity, making him truly *Dangerous*.

Amulet of Set

These magical pendants, shaped in the form of a coiled snake, are one of the many devious artifacts forged by the Serpent Men during the Age of Magic, when their dark power was at its zenith.

When worn by a Serpent Man, an Amulet of Set allows the creature to appear as a normal human to any onlooker – except Sorcerers, Lyrists, Priests and beings with Psychic Powers, who are all immune to the power of the amulet.

The illusory disguise immediately wears off when the wearer dies or if the Amulet is removed or destroyed; it also dissipates briefly every time the Serpent Man uses one of its Psychic Powers.

Sufut also has a 8-point *Staff of Power* (see *Maze Masters Guide* p.42) loaded at full capacity as well as two *Rings of Sorcery* (see *Pandora's Box i*n issue 3 of the *Minotaur*), one adorned with a ruby and the other with a sapphire, which raise his Psychic Gift and Mystic Strength by +2 when using Compelling, Psychic Attack and Enslavement powers.

Taxonomy : Folk

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Crafty

Mystique : Eldritch

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 15

Melee Attack : +4

Damage : 1d6 (weapon)

Defense Class : 14

Hits Total : 16

Detection / Evasion : +10 / +8

Mystic Fortitude : +8

Special Abilities : Magic Resistance, Psychic Powers (Psychic Gift 5/7, Mystic Strength 17/19, 20 Power pts + 8 pts stored in Staff of Power), Regeneration (2 / rnd), Sixth Sense, Supernatural Vigor.

Awards : Glory 100, Wisdom 250.

Mebek the Craven

The only human priest privy to the real nature of the Serpent Folk, this collaborator runs the errands of the serpents for two reasons: because he sees it as the safest way to save his own skin, and because of his greedy lust for the temple treasures. He carries keys to all of the doors in the temple. He will switch sides spinelessly depending on the balance of power, and can be used by the Maze Master to help the PCs along, since he is easily coerced and privy to many secrets. In game terms, Mebek the Craven is a non-combatant Minor NPC, with 4 Hits.

Retia the Amazon

Kloviz the Barbarian and his big battle-axe

Atumhotep

A learned and benign scribe in his late seventies, Atumhotep is scarred by the terrors of the Island of Apophis and too old and infirm to be of any use in combat (non-combatant, 4 Hits). The old, benevolent sage has a tendency to fall into danger, and may have to be rescued from many precarious situations.

Epiktekos

Resolute in the face of adversity, the brave Minean Epiktekos is the leader of the prisoners. He hasn't been able to put any of his plans of escape into action but sees the arrival of the player-characters as a chance to lead his little group into safety. He is a rough rogue and treasure hunter with a heart of gold, turned hero by the turn of events. Epiktekos has the stats of a Soldier NPC (*Creature Compendium*, p.60).

Unfortunate NPC Adventurers

A band of adventurers tried to defeat Apophis and his evil cult before the player characters. They were lured into a trap and enslaved by the vile hypnotic sorcery of the Serpent Folk. They no longer act like sentient beings but are murderous automatons.

The player characters will have to fight and defeat these valiant co-adventurers. They are led by the Amazon Retia, a flaxen-haired princess of her tribe and devotee of Artemis; and the taciturn Barbarian Kloviz who fights using a massive, two-handed battle-axe and has a strong sense of duty and honor. For simplicity's sake, Retia should be treated as a typical Amazon NPC, with shield and helmet (*Creature Compendium* p.59), Kloviz as a typical Barbarian NPC (*Creature Compendium* p.60 and the other adventurers as Soldiers (*Compendium* p. 60).

MYTHIC BESTIARY

DENIZENS OF THE DESERT

Blood Tree

Taxonomy : Animate

Description : These vampiric palm trees are always found around near small oases, preying on hapless travellers. Since they *are* trees, they are rooted in the ground and cannot move across land; their trunk, however, is extremely bendy and their green palms are actually vegetal tentacles which they use to entangle their victims and drain their blood.

Size : Large

Ferocity : Aggressive

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Weird

Movement : n/a (cannot move)

Initiative : 11

Melee Attack : n/a *

Damage : see below

Defense Class : 13

Hits Total : 24

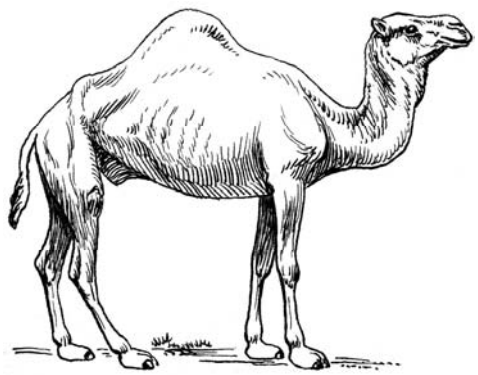
Detection / Evasion : 0

Mystic Fortitude : +6

Special Abilities : Entangle (20', Might = 20), Life-Energy Drain (touch, see below), Magic Resistance, Mindless, Supernatural Vigor.

** The Blood Tree's only mode of direct attack is their Entangle ability; they can only use their Life-Energy Drain on a previously Entangled victim; the victim is allowed a Danger Evasion saving roll against the Life Energy Drain attack, as per the usual rules but with the usual penalty of -4 for being Entangled.*

Awards : Glory 110, Wisdom 60.



Camel

Taxonomy : Beast

Description : Standard one-humped desert camel, also known as *dromedary*.

Size : Medium (but has very long legs)

Ferocity : Aggressive

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Normal

Movement : 60' (240' galloping)

Initiative : 11

Melee Attack : n/a (see below)

Damage : see below

Defense Class : 12

Hits Total : 8

Detection / Evasion : 0

Mystic Fortitude : 0

Special Abilities : Charge Into Battle (special, see below), Gallop, Trample.

Awards : None. They are just mounts, like horses.

Notes : Dromedaries can be quite ornery and obstinate beasts (hence their Aggressive Ferocity) but their only real mode of attack is their *Trample* (which, as per the usual rules, can only be used when Charging Into Battle)… as well as their rear kick, which works exactly as a free Trample attack except that it can only be used against imprudent people standing behind the camel and cannot be used if the camel is running at full movement (or galloping). Aside from these two special attacks, camels don't have any regular form of melee attack; their *Charge Into Battle* bonus (+2 to Initiative and Melee) only apply to their rider's scores.

Crocodiles

River Crocodile

Taxonomy : Beast

Description : This beast is the standard man-sized crocodile from the Khet river. A much larger (and rarer) breed exists : see *Royal Crocodiles* below.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Alert

Mystique : Normal

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 13 (15 in water)

Melee Attack : +4 (+5 in water)

Damage : 1d6 (bite)

Defense Class : 14 (16 in water)

Hits Total : 12

Detection / Evasion : +2/+2 (+6/+4 in water)

Mystic Fortitude : 0

Special Abilities : Amphibian, Sharp Senses (in water only), Stealthy (14), Tough Skin, Uncanny Agility (in water only).

Awards : Glory 35 (on land) / 50 (in the water) or 70 / 100 points of Experience for Hunters.

Royal Crocodile

Taxonomy : Beast

Description : Enormous, rhino-sized crocodiles bred by the Sons of Sobek (see p 41) who use them as pets, guardians and warbeasts.

Size : Large

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Alert

Mystique : Normal

Movement : 90'

Initiative : 13 (15 in water)

Melee Attack : +6

Damage : 2d6 (bite)

Defense Class : 14

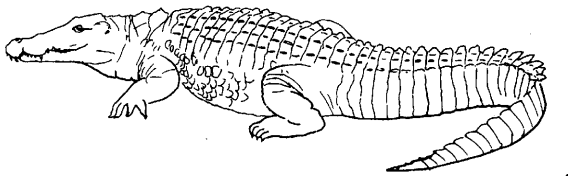
Hits Total : 24

Detection / Evasion : +2/+2 (+6/+2 in water)

Mystic Fortitude : 0

Special Abilities : Amphibian, Sharp Senses (in water only), Tough Skin.

Awards : Glory 60 (on land) / 70 (in the water) or 100 / 140 points of Experience for Hunters.



Desert Demons

As their name implies, Desert Demons are evil Spirits who haunt the lone and level sands of the deep desert, preying on lost travellers and foolhardy adventurers. Mysterious, incorporeal and utterly fiendish, they somehow "embody" (well, sure, they have no body *per se* but we're sure you know what we mean) the perils of the desert – indeed, the great Khettim philosopher Azaron once referred to them as "the great parasites of the desert". According to most reliable sources on the matter, Desert Demons are the creations of the evil god Sethos (who rules over the desert, among other things). As all Insubstantial beings, Desert Demons can only be harmed by magic. There are three different types of Desert Demons, each of which is detailed below : Mirage Demons, Sand Demons and Thirst Demons.

Mirage Demon

Taxonomy : Spirit

Description : Mirage Demons appear as intangible, vaguely outlined, shimmering silhouettes of twilight which can blend at will with their surroundings. This makes them nearly invisible, as reflected by their amazing Stealth score (see below). They often use their Psychic Powers to confuse, lure and trick their victims before killing them with their psychic attacks.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Crafty

Mystique : Eldritch

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 15

Melee Attack : n/a*

Damage : see below *

Defense Class : 14

Hits Total : 12

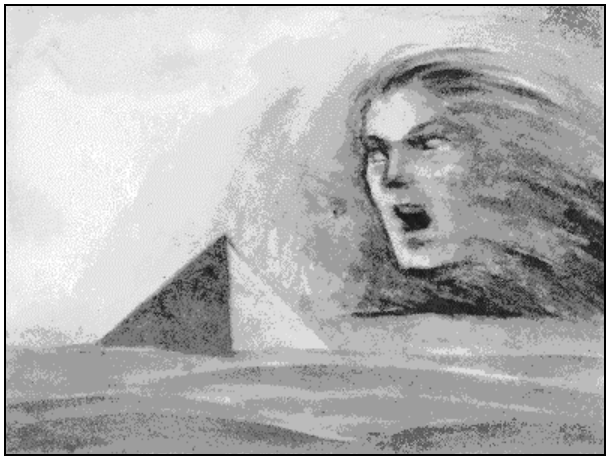
Detection / Evasion : +10 / +8

Mystic Fortitude : +8

Special Abilities : Camouflage (*all* environments), Insubstantial, Magic Resistance, Psychic Powers (Psychic Gift 5, Mystic Strength 17, Power total 20), Sixth Sense, Stealthy (26).

* *Their only attack form is their Psychic Attack.*

Awards : Glory 110, Wisdom 500.



Sand Demon

Taxonomy : Spirit

Description : Sand Demons appear as vaguely humanoid clouds of sand. The outlines of their evil, sardonic faces can sometimes be glimpsed - but only if they wish so. Sand Demons are able to project intangible, swirling tendrils of bruning sand from their arms, which they use to drain the life-energy of their victims.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Deadly

Cunning : Clever

Mystique : Eldritch

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 15

Melee Attack : n/a *

Damage : see below *

Defense Class : 14

Hits Total : 16

Detection / Evasion : +8 / +6

Mystic Fortitude : +8

Special Abilities : Camouflage (sand), Entangle (10', Might = 16, see below for more), Insubstantial, Life Energy Drain (touch attack, see below), Magic Resistance, Sixth Sense, Stealthy (20, 24 in sand).

Awards : Glory 115, Wisdom 140.

** Their only way to cause direct damage to their opponents is their Life-Energy Drain (touch attack). Their Entangle ability represents their power to engulf ftheir victims in clouds of sand; since Entanglement causes a -4 to Initiative, Melee and Danger Evasion, it makes the Demon's victim more vulnerable to subsequent Life-Energy Drain attacks.*

Thirst Demon

Taxonomy : Spirit

Description : Thirst Demons appear as yellowish, intangible, vaguely humanoid silhouettes which seem to be made of dust. Their touch always causes a feeling of intense dryness – and may even cause instant dehydratation, as detailed below.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Alert

Mystique : Eldritch

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 13

Melee Attack : n/a *

Damage : see below *

Defense Class : 14

Hits Total : 12

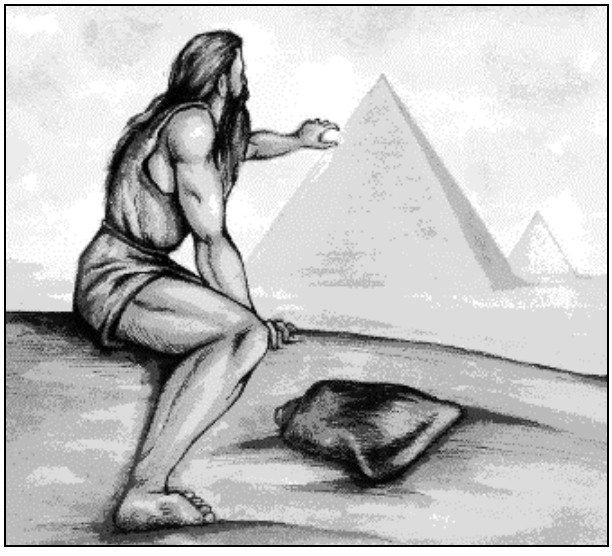
Detection / Evasion : +2

Mystic Fortitude : +8

Special Abilities : Insubstantial, Magic Resistance, Life Energy Drain (touch attack, special saving roll, see below), Stealthy (18).

Awards : Glory 75, Wisdom 120.

** A Thirst Demon's only way to cause direct damage is its Life-Energy Drain (touch attack), which actually represents its ability to dehydrate its victims : for this reason, the saving roll against this attack uses the victim's Physical Vigor rather than Danger Evasion.*



Hippopotamus

Taxonomy : Beast

Description : Your standard, massive hippo.

Size : Large

Ferocity : Aggressive

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Normal

Movement : 90'

Initiative : 11

Melee Attack : +4

Damage : 2d6

Defense Class : 14

Hits Total : 18

Detection / Evasion : 0

Mystic Fortitude : 0

Special Abilities : Amphibian, Tough Skin.

Awards : Glory 30 (60 Experience points for Hunters).

Shaalud

Taxonomy : Monster

Description : Also known as Desert Worms, these titanic carnivorous worms burrow deep below the sands of the deep desert, sometimes emerging to the surface to wreak havoc and destruction…

Size : Gigantic

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Eldritch

Movement : 120' (crawling)

Initiative : 14

Melee Attack : +8

Damage : 3d6 (fangs)

Defense Class : 18

Hits Total : 50

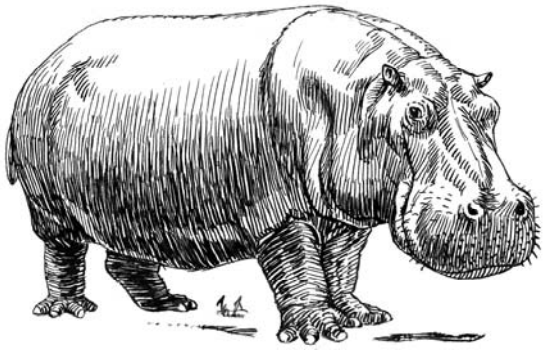
Detection / Evasion : +4 / +2

Mystic Fortitude : +6

Special Abilities : Camouflage (desert), Crushing Damage (constriction; req. successful Grapple attack), Fearsome, Grapple (with body, M = 24), Magic Resistance, Mindless, Regeneration (3 Hits / round), Sixth Sense, Stealthy (12, in the desert), Supernatural Vigor, Tough Skin.

Awards : Glory 1100, Wisdom 70.

Additional Lore : Shaalud are not just "gigantic animals"; although they are Mindless, they do possess an undeniable aura of mystical majesty and are even regarded as divine beings by some tribes of desert nomads and Beastmen.



Shabti

Taxonomy : Animate

Description : These clay Animates look like crude statues of Khettim soldiers; they are often found in ancient tombs, guarding the treasure and corpses of powerful dead nobles, as described in this issue's *Gazetteer* (p 7), usually in platoons of 3-8 'men'.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Aggressive

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Weird

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 11

Melee Attack : +2

Damage : 1d6 (weapons)

Defense Class : 15

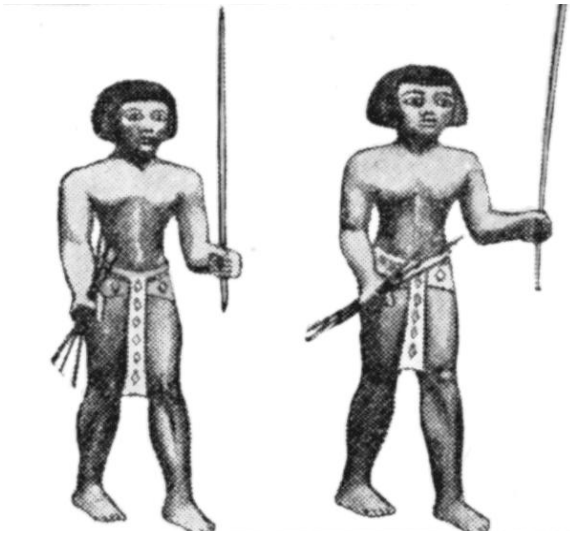
Hits Total : 12

Detection / Evasion : 0

Mystic Fortitude : +6

Special Abilities : Magic Resistance, Mindless, Tough Skin, Supernatural Vigor.

Awards : Glory 40, Wisdom 40.



Sons of Sobek

Taxonomy : Folk

Description : These crocodile-headed humanoids (complete with tails, scaly skin and, of course, teeth) dwell in small, well-defended river colonies in the southernmost parts of the Khet valley. They are of course fond of human flesh and tend to see humans as food rather than as foes. The Sons of Sobek are sworn enemies of the Anubians and the Ubasti, a fact which has often been exploited by clever Khettim diplomats (or desperate adventurers) to forge temporary alliances (or simply save their skin). Regardless of how hungry they feel, they will never harm a Priest of Sobek (but have no qualms about killing and eating mere worshippers of their parent god – in fact, some of them even feel that human worshippers of Sobek should actually feel honored to be devoured by their god's favorite Sons.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Alert

Mystique : Weird

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 13

Melee Attack : +4

Damage : 1d6 (see below)

Defense Class : 15

Hits Total : 16

Detection / Evasion : +2

Mystic Fortitude : +2

Special Abilities : Amphibian, Crushing Damage (bite), Grapple (Might = 16), Stealthy (14), Supernatural Vigor, Tough Skin.

Even though they have fully prehensile hands, Sons of Sobek do not usually use weapons; their usual method of attack is to Grapple his target and then bite him for 1d6 damage per battle round, as per the usual rules on Crushing Damage.

Awards : Glory 65, Wisdom 10.

Stublings

Taxonomy : Folk

Description : Also known as Earth Gnomes, these squat (3'), cheerfully ugly but very clever humanoids are said to have been created by Khnum, the ram-headed potter-god – not as fully-fledged creatures but as rough casts of what would eventually become humans. Stublings can be found in the underground realms of the Khet Valley, where they live in small, secluded colonies. They are peaceful (but very wary) beings; they do not see themselves as fighters, but as crafters – their skill as potters is indeed renowned in all the Desert Kingdom. They usually only associate with humans to thwart the nefarious schemes of their enemies – which include Anubians as well as the Serpent and Scorpion Folks. Aside from their skill as potters, Stubmen are also noted for their inordinate love of alcoholic beverages (and a drunken Stubling can be as obnoxious as a drunken Satyr…)

Size : Small

Ferocity : Peaceful

Cunning : Crafty

Mystique : Weird

Movement : 45'

Initiative : 13

Melee Attack : 0

Damage : 1d3 (weapons)

Defense Class : 15

Hits Total : 4

Detection / Evasion : +6

Mystic Fortitude : +6

Special Abilities : Magic Resistance, Supernatural Vigor, Tough Skin.

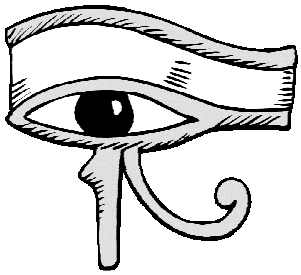
Awards : Glory 8, Wisdom 30.

Olivier Legrand (2009)

PANDORA'S BOX

A regular selection of new mythic items for Mazes & Minotaurs

TREASURES & TALISMANS OF THE DESERT KINGDOM



Amulet of Bastet

This amulet in the image of the cat-goddess Bastet gives a +2 bonus to the wearer's stealth and detection rolls. It also adds +2 to the target number of detection rolls made to detect the character.

Amulet of Set

This black, snake-shaped amulet can only be used by Sorcerers who worship the evil serpent god Set; it makes the user's sorcerous powers more difficult to resist, boosting his Mystic Fortitude by +2.

Amulet of Thoth

This ibis-shaped amulet has the same powers as a Ring of Mystic Lore (see *Maze Masters Guide* p 43). Note that the bonuses granted by the two items are non-cumulative.

Ankh Amulet

Not all ankh-shaped amulets atually have true magical virtues but when they do, they grant their wearer a +2 bonus to all his Physical Vigor rolls.

Eye of Horus

Also known as a *wadjet*, this eye-shaped amulet is believed to act as a ward against evil. In game terms, it grants a +2 bonus to Mystic Fortitude to its wearer.

Fish Amulet

As detailed in this issue's Gazetteer, these fish-shaped amulets are thought to protect against the danger of drowning and are quite commonplace in the Desert Kingdom – but most of them are actually worthless trinkets devoid of true magical powers. There are, however, some genuinely magical fish amulets, which provide a +2 bonus to Athletic Prowess and Physical Vigor saving rolls made to swim or avoid drowning.

Helmet of Sekhmet

This impressive helmet looks like a cross between a battle helm and a lion-faced golden mask. It gives its wearer a +4 bonus to EDC (rather than the usual +2), which also extends to all saving rolls made to resist or avoid the effects of poison, disease or fire (including those of supernatural origin).

Mace of Horus

This beautifully-crafted battle mace, with a striking head in the shape of a falcon's head, gives a +2 bonus to Melee and damage but only when wielded by a worshipper of Horus. (Enc = 1)

Ointment of Meretseger

This sticky, black, repulsive ointment acts as a very effective snake repellent and also has anti-venomous properties. For the ointment to be effective, it must be rubbed over the entire body, which requires approximately one minute. The effects of the ointment last for a number of hours equal to 4 plus or minus the character's Luck modifier : during this time, no snake will willingly attack the character unless the snakes are provoked first ; in this case, the ointment will give the character a +4 EDC bonus against the snake's attacks as well as to his Physical Vigor saving rolls against the effects of snake venom. These effects apply to natural and monstrous snakes (such as Giant Snakes) but not to supernatural serpentine creatures, snake-like Spirits or Animates etc.

The stench of the ointment is such that the character suffers a -4 penalty to Personal Charisma.

Scarab Amulets

Silver Scarab Amulet

This mystical, beetle-shaped silver amulet provides a +1 bonus to any saving roll (Mystic Fortitude, Danger Evasion etc) made to resist or avoid the powers of a Spirit as well as a +1 bonus to EDC against attacks made by Spirits.

Golden Scarab Amulet

This is a more powerful (and golden) version of the above, granting a bonus of +2 to the wearer's saving rolls as well as to his EDC against attacks made by Spirits. A Golden Scarab Amulet can only be worn by a Khettim Noble or Khettim Priest. When worn by any other character, the amulet will simlply exhibit no magical properties. Combining the two type of Amulets will *not* result in a bonus of +3.

Staff of Ra

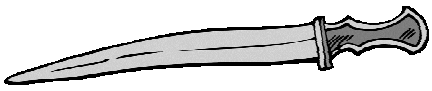
This magical golden-tipped staff will only be of use to Elementalists who wield the power of Light (see *M&M Companion*, p 19). When holding a Staff of Ra, such a character will only have to expend half the usual Power to fuel his Light-based magic (ie 1, 2 or 3 Power points instead of the regular 2, 4 or 6 points) (Enc = 2).

Staff of Typhon

This magical jet black staff will only be of use to Elementalists who wield the power of Darkness (see *M&M Companion*, p 19). When holding such a staff, the Elementalist will only have to expend half the usual Power to fuel his Darkness powers (ie 1, 2 or 3 Power points instead of the regular 2, 4 or 6 points) (Enc = 2).

Sword of Sekhmet

The magical virtues of this sword only become apparent when the weapon is used by a warrior with a Might score of 13+ against a creature with the Regeneration special ability, increasing the attacker's damage roll by his Might bonus. Thus, a warrior with a Might of 15 or 16 using this sword would cause +2 damage to beings with the Regeneration ability. The sword has no special powers against other types of opponents. (Enc = 1).



The Nine Scrolls of Thoth

The first seven Scrolls of Thoth are essentially the same as the Seven Scrolls of Thessalia (see *Maze Masters Guide* p 46) except that they are written in High Khemi Script. The benefits of their contents cannot be combined with those of the Thessalian Scrolls, since their contents are identical; thus, a Sorcerer who has already studied the first three Scrolls of Thessalia will learn nothing new by reading the first three Scrolls of Thoth.

The eighth and ninth scrolls, however, contain additional mystical knowledge, unveiling some long-forgotten arcane of Sorcery : reading the eighth scroll will bring 200 Wisdom points, while the ninth scroll is worth a supreme 300 points. It should be noted, however, that the Wisdom contained in these scrolls can only be understood by a Sorcerer of at least level 4 (for the eighth scroll) or 5 (for the ninth scroll); any Sorcerer of a lower level attempting to read them will simply gain nothing from the experience (and will find it a pretty boring read).

Wand of Thoth

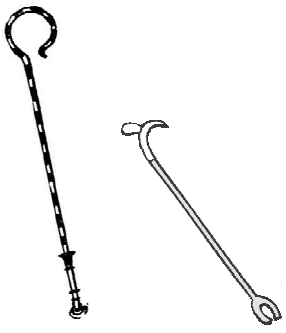
This magic wand has a golden tip in the stylized shape of an ibis head. A Sorcerer who wields it when making a Psychic Attack against a creature with Magic Resistance will add +4 to his Mystic Strength (thereby negating the benefits of the target's Magic Resistance). (Enc = 1)

Was Sceptre

This is the famous hooked sceptre often displayed by high-ranking Khettim Nobles. Not all hooked sceptres are magical, but when they are, they give a +2 bonus to their holder's Personal Charisma and Mystic Fortitude. Note that the sceptre has to be held *in hand* (and not, say, tucked in a belt) to grant these bonuses (Enc = 1).

Was Staff

This is a staff version of the above, specifically made for high-ranking Khettim Priests. Indeed, only the Priest of a Khettim deity can benefit from its magical virtues : a Priest holding a Was Staff in hand receives a +2 bonus to his Mystic Fortitude as well as to his Spiritual Aura, thereby increasing the power of his Divine Prodigies (Enc = 2).



THE SECRET OF ZERZURA

An Epic Desert Kingdom Adventure in Three Parts by Andrew Pearce

PART ONE : DANGER & DECEIT IN THE DESERT

Introduction

'Scattered across the Desert Kingdom are an unknown number of fertile oases. The routes to these oases are often carefully guarded secrets, and no-one – not even the Desert King – knows them all' (Anagnosis of Thena). So wrote the greatest-living authority (of non-Khettim origin, at any rate) on the Desert Kingdom.

Although most of the oases of the Mirror of Fire have been long-known, persistent rumors speak of others whose location has been lost. The most enduring legend speaks of Zerzura, the Oasis of Birds.

In fact, the earliest certain mention of Zerzura dates from the reign of Menemkhet I and is only about two hundred and fifty years old – but, with each passing generation, the power of the legend of Zerzura has grown more elaborate.

According to some, it is a place of everlasting happiness, whose inhabitants have twice or even three times the lifespan of lesser mortals, free from all disease or want. According to others, it houses the lost tombs and treasure-stores of the First Dynasty kings.

A third rumor equates it with the legendary 'lost army' of Akenre I – 5000 Khettim soldiers who mysteriously disappeared in the desert whilst campaigning for that most vigorous of Desert Kings against the baleful forces of the Stygian Empire. Who knows whether there is a smidgen of truth in any these stories, or whether the tale of Zerzura is a complete fabrication?

Nevertheless, the mysterious allure of this lost oasis continues to fascinate both Khettim and visitors to the Desert Kingdom alike. Now, perhaps, one intrepid band of adventures has the chance to solve the mystery of Zerzura, once and for all. Will they be able to face the challenge of the Oasis of Birds?

Recommendation for Maze Masters

Although this adventure is suitable for Minean characters, it is recommended that at least one of the player characters be a native Khettim. If the adventuring party does include Mineans, it will also be helpful (though not essential) if at least one of them has a long-standing knowledge of the Desert Kingdom, e.g. has adventured in the Desert Kingdom before. Any such adventure could offer a plausible reason for the High Priestess of Hathor having heard of the player characters – though, obviously, sufficient renown from 'foreign adventures' might be satisfactory.

A busy day at the Market of Kebet

Act I: The Festival of Perfumes

The Market of Kebet

The player characters are visiting the Desert Kingdom township of Kebet on the eve of the Festival of Perfumes – the principal religious celebration of the year in Kebet, dedicated to Hathor, goddess of love, and patron of the 5th nome within which Kebet stands.

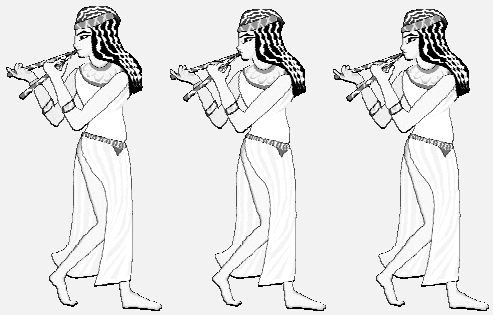
Kebet is famous for many of its products, including fine linens and quality gold artefacts. The adventure begins with the player characters visiting the market-stalls of the main, riverside market.

Whilst at the market, the characters are approached by a young, modestly-veiled woman, who introduces herself as Akenhathor (an observant character of Khettim origin or with some knowledge of Khettim cults will recognize that the young woman wears a silver moon and cows horns pendant – the holy symbol of the priestesses of Hathor).

Akenhathor explains that she is an acolyte of Hathor, and that she has been commanded to seek out the adventurers – whose brave deeds have come to the attention of her mistress. Her mistress wishes to speak to them about a noble quest for which she is seeking honorable and valiant champions.

If they are interested, they are to come to the First Courtyard of the Rose Temple tonight – the first night of the three-night Festival of Perfumes.

The Festival of Perfumes



The Festival of Perfumes, held over the three nights of the first full moon of winter, is the highlight of the year in the district of Kebet. The principal rites of the festival are held in the beautiful Rose Temple.

On the first night, the crowds gather in the First Courtyard, where the devotees sing songs of praise to Hathor, and play *sistrums* (rattle-like percussion instrument), *neys* (flute-like instruments) and *arghuls* (double-piped woodwind instruments). This is the only night of the year when non-Khettim are allowed to enter the First Courtyard (except by express permission of the High Priestess of Hathor).

On the second night, the sacred idol of Hathor is taken on procession through the streets of Kebet.

On the third – and most sacred – night of the festival, the most sacrosanct ceremonies are performed within the Inner Courts of the Temple, and the adjacent Garden of Delights. Admittance to these ceremonies is strictly limited to consecrated devotees of Hathor – but it is rumored that these hidden rites are noted for their uninhibited sensuality.

The Rose Temple

That night, the adventurers make their way to the First Courtyard. The crush of the crowds, the noise of the music, and sweet-smelling incense and perfumes are almost overwhelming.

After several hours have passed, the adventurers are approached by Akenhathor, who will escort them to the entrance of a low building on the edge of the courtyard. They enter, passing a pair of burly, silent guards. The building appears to be a simple shrine to Hathor, dominated by a full-sized bas-relief of the goddess on the farthest wall.

Akenhathor presses the silver moon disc that surmounts the goddess' headdress, and the whole back wall slides to one side, revealing a stairway beyond. Following the acolyte, the adventurers travel along a long, winding tunnel for what seems an age, before ascending another flight of steps that emerges into a richly decorated, sumptuously furnished ante-chamber.

Akenhathor bids the adventurers to wait for a few minutes, and other acolytes move forward with drinks and delicacies on silver platters.

After about ten minutes, she returns, and bids the characters follow her. She explains, in a low whisper:

"You are about to meet my mistress – the High Priestess of Hathor. It is a private audience, and the ceremonies therefore are limited – but, nevertheless, it is expected that you not draw nearer than three paces to the Priestess, and that you should then bow before her – and wait until she commands you to arise. Also, it is not permitted for any to look directly at the Priestess, nor to speak to her except in answer to her enquiry. Finally, you must leave your weapons here, in the Chamber of Welcome. I promise that they will be kept safe, and will be returned to you later. The penalty for non-observance of these protocols is severe. Is that understood?"

An Audience with a Queen

Akenhathor guides the adventurers through several doorways – each guarded by a pair of tall, muscular and silent warriors – with each room more richly decorated than its predecessor. Passing through the final set of doors – made of lacquered rosewood, inlaid with silver – the party enter a high-roofed chamber decorated with white and rose-colored floor-tiles, and with walls bearing brightly-colored reliefs of the gods.

At the far end, on a raised dais, set between two life-size matching silver statues of the goddess Hathor, is a simple rosewood throne. Sitting upon the throne is the High Priestess Amenteti, wearing the sacred headdress of Hathor. To either side of her stand two motionless guards – and each of them is resting his sword-hand on the hilt of his ceremonial sword.

Amenteti herself is in her mid sixties, but the abundant make-up she wears makes her appear somewhat younger. Her aquiline features and her piercing, calculating eyes give her an aura of strength and confidence. She is clearly a powerful individual, and not one to be trifled with.

The majestic Amenteti, Queen Mother of the Desert Kingdom and High Priestess of Hathor

The Identity of the High Priestess

Khettim adventurers (and any Minean adventurer with a significant knowledge of the Desert Kingdom) will immediately recognize that the High Priestess of Hathor is Amenteti – the Queen Mother of the Desert Kingdom, and mother to the Desert King Nebheptah II himself. Amenteti is well-known to have the favor of the king, and may, indeed, be a prime mover behind some of his more enlightened policies. She is much-loved by the people – but greatly disliked by the younger brother of her later husband, King Menemkhet III. Her brother-in-law Prince Sekhemnet is highly-traditional in his views, and fears that King Nebheptah is leading the Desert Kingdom on a course that will earn the wrath of the gods and bring disaster to the Khettim.

After the party have made the required observances of dereference, the High Priestess calmly invites them to be seated. She will exchange some courtesies with them – as is customary according to Khettim court etiquette – before getting down to business.

"I have summoned you here, tonight, she begins, because I have heard of your wisdom, your courage and your skill at arms. I am much in need of ones with such abilities – adventurers prepared to undertake a quest of considerable challenge and danger. It will involve a long journey through the harshest parts of the Great Desert. The perils of that journey will be many. But the rewards will be great: honor, glory and knowledge; material riches, of course; but, most importantly, the favor of Queen Amentiti – and perhaps even the favor of the Desert King – may life, prosperity and health be unto him! But before I tell you more, I must know – will you accept this quest?"

The Quest for Zerzura

Assuming the adventurers acquiesce, Queen Amenteti will tell the adventures the tale of Zerzura (see Introduction above). Many, of course, she explains, have dismissed the tale of Zerzura as a worthless legend. However, the Queen will continue by revealing the recent discovery of an ancient manuscript in the Library of Thoth in Pstatis – the Book of Hidden Pearls. This manuscript tells of many wondrous places within the Desert Kingdom – some well-known, some now lost. Although sadly damaged and incomplete, the Book of Hidden Pearls apparently gives an account of Zerzura, and its location.

The City of Zerzura

…You will find palms and vines and flowing wells. Follow the valley until you meet another valley opening to the west between two hills. In it you will find a road. Follow it. It will lead you to the City of Zerzura. You will find its gate closed. It is a white city, like a dove. By the gate you will find a bird sculptured. Stretch up your hand to its beak and take from it a key. Open the gate with it and enter the city. You will find much wealth and the king and queen in their place sleeping the sleep of enchantment. Do not go near them. Take the treasure and that is all.

*From the **Book of Hidden Pearls***

Putting together the fragmentary references to Zerzura in the Book of Hidden Pearls with other evidence has allowed the Queen to build up the most complete picture of the Oasis of Birds ever assembled. Amenteti has no doubt whatsoever that Zerzura is real – and that it is the resting place of Osiris and Isis, the heroic demigods of three and a half centuries ago.

Amenteti believes the legend (one of many that tell of the final fate of Osiris and Isis) that the two demigods sleep, awaiting a time of great peril for the Desert Kingdom – a time when they will awaken to once again defend the Khettim against the forces of evil.

Amenteti wants the adventurers to travel to Zerzura, to confirm that Osiris and Isis are 'sleeping the sleep of enchantment', and to return to her with some token in proof that it is so. They are not to disturb the sleepers – it will be for others to decide if and when the time has come to awaken them.

Amenteti warns the adventurers that the Library of Thoth was ransacked a few weeks ago. She believes that the Cult of the Dark Gods (see this issue's Mythika Gazetteer) may be behind the attack, and that they may have been searching for the Book of Hidden Pearls. She does not know how the Cult could have heard of the manuscript – but it is known that the Cult has friends and spies in high places.

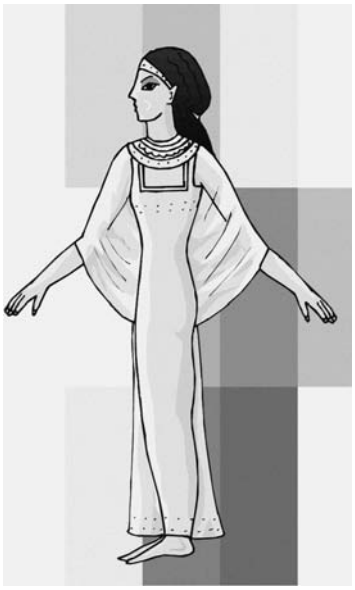
Given the enmity felt by the Dark God Cultists towards those who revere Osiris and Isis, Amenteti is fearful of the consequences of them learning of Zerzura's location, and the identity of the king and queen who rest there. That is why Amenteti dare not launch a major expedition herself – for fear of being observed and possibly trumped by the Cultists. A less-conspicuous expedition (with the aid of non-Khettim) is, she believes, advisable at this stage. However, once the Queen receives the proof she needs, she intends to inform the Desert King; and, with his help, will then move swiftly to secure Zerzura's safety.

Amenteti gives the adventurers a map, put together with information from the Book of Hidden Pearls and other sources, as well as a copy of the relevant passages from the manuscript (see box above). She explains that the best time to depart Kebet unmarked will be early in the morning after the third (and final) night of the Festival of Perfumes – a time when nearly everybody in Kebet will be 'sleeping-off' the excesses of the festivities.

Finally, at Amenteti's direction, one of her guards brings forward a chest inlaid with silver. The guard opens the chest, and with his sword stirs the hundreds of silver and gold coins and gemstones visibly mixed therein. Amenteti indicates that this rich reward will be the adventurers if they successfully complete their mission.

The High Priestess asks the adventurers to excuse her as she must attend to certain important religious duties. She explains that Akenhathor will be available to help the adventurers with any further information or other requests (within reason) they may have. She wishes the blessings of Ra, Hathor and Horus to be upon them, 'and whatever foreign gods you may believe in'.

Akenhathor whispers to the adventurers fiercely: *'Now we stand, we bow, and we leave – walking backwards!'*



The treacherous Akenhathor, grand-daughter of Queen Amenteti… and secret worshipper of the Dark Gods

The Truth about Akenhathor

Appearances can be deceptive: for Akenhathor is not the faithful servant of the High Priestess that she appears to be. In fact, Akenhathor has not one, but two carefully guarded secrets. The first is that she is the grand-daughter of Queen Amenteti. The second is that she is a secret adherent of the Cult of Dark Gods!

Akenhathor's mother was Satsekhem, daughter of Amenteti and Menemkhet III, and brother to Nebheptah. Satsekhem was noted for her beauty, but also her headstrong temperament. Unbeknown to her father, she became enamoured of a nobleman from an impoverished family named Intef. Their brief but passionate romance was discovered by Amenteti, who reported the matter to the king. Menemkhet discovered that Satsekhem was with child, and, in his anger, ordered Intef to be executed; his daughter was placed in confinement before the scandal could become public.

Six months later Satsekhem gave birth to Akenhathor, but died in labor. Amenteti hid the child, and raised her secretly within the Rose Temple; she told Menemkhet that the baby had died alongside the mother.

Eighteen years later, Amenteti revealed to Akenhathor her mother's true identity, but swore her to secrecy. Akenhathor has subsequently discovered that her father was killed by Menemkhet. Although seemingly possessed of a great affection for Amenteti, in reality Akenhathor's heart is now filled with hatred for the High Priestess, who she blames for the demise of both her parents. This hatred also extends to the current king, her uncle Nebheptah (who, ironically, knows nothing of Akenhathor's existence, nor of the true circumstances surrounding the death of his sister Satsekhem).

For the past three years, ever since discovering her true lineage, Akenhathor has been a secret member of the Cult of Dark Gods, attached to the 'Circle of Sobek'. Six weeks ago she learnt from the High Priestess of the discovery of the Book of Hidden Pearls, and reported the discovery to her superiors.

The Cult organized a raid on the Library of Thoth, in the hope of either finding an additional copy of the book, or of finding the missing portions of the damaged manuscript. The raid was unsuccessful, serving only to warn Amenteti of a traitor within her inner circle. Nevertheless, blinded by her affection (or perhaps feelings of guilt?) towards Akenhathor, the High Priestess continued to confide in her. Finally, seven days ago, Akenhathor was able to make a copy of both Amenteti's map and the Book of Hidden Pearls, and smuggled them out of the Temple to a Cultist agent.

The Cult of Dark Gods acted swiftly, and two days ago a Cultist expedition departed Kebet in search of Zerzura. However, much to Akenhathor's annoyance, Amenteti has learned of the recent arrival of the adventurous PCs in Kebet. Acting on Amenteti's instructions, Akenhathor has brought them to the Rose Temple – but has also persuaded the High Priestess that the best way of avoiding the attention of the Cult (and its hidden spy within the Temple) would be for the adventurers to delay their departure until immediately after the end of the Festival of Perfumes. Akenhathor has thus, in effect, bought the Cultist expedition an additional two days to their existing two day head start over their rivals.

Given the chance, Akenhathor will also try to sow the seeds of suspicion in the adventurers' minds that Prince Sekhemnet belongs to the Cult of Dark Gods. This, of course, is completely false.

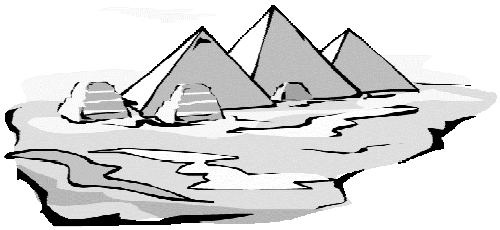
Finally, and crucially, Akenhathor will omit to hand over to the adventurers a statue of Bastet that the High Priestess Amenteti has directed be given to the Ubasti of the Khofer Oasis – the first stop on their journey – as a sign of good faith. Without this statue, the adventurers face a tough task in winning the help of the Ubasti (not that they know this yet, of course).

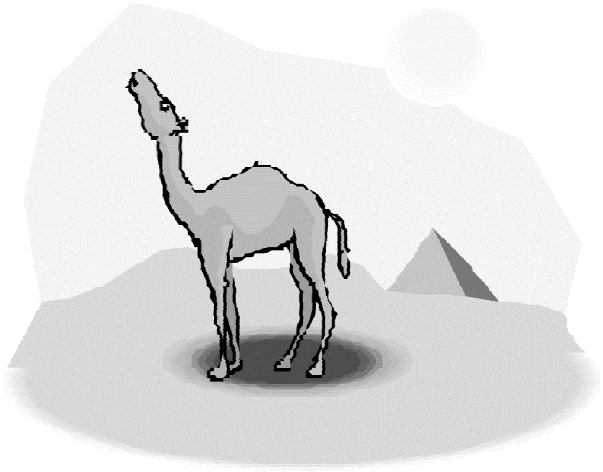
All in all, as the adventurers depart, Akenhathor will feel quite satisfied that she has done much to hinder them…

Preparing for the Journey

Akenhathor will be helpful in assisting the player characters as they prepare for their journey. In particular, she will procure a camel for each adventurer (plus an additional draft camel). She will also ensure that the party is well-equipped with a sufficient supply of two-man desert tents. However, if the PCs ask for foodstuffs, or other basic adventuring gear, she will point them in the direction of the local markets.

If questioned by the characters about their mission, Akenhathor actually has little to add to what Amenteti has already told them. However, if asked about the Cult of Dark Gods, she will hint (but not explicitly state) that Queen Amenteti suspects Prince Sekhemnet of being a hidden devotee of the Cult…





The Camel : the desert adventurer's best friend

Act II: The Ubasti of Khufre

The Journey Begins

Sufficiently provisioned, the adventurers begin their journey. Their first objective is the Oasis of Khofer, three days south-west of Kebet (see map).

Characters who have little or no experience of riding camels will need to make a Danger Evasion roll with a target number of 10 to avoid falling off their camel (and taking 1D6 damage) on the first day of travel. Characters succeeding do not need to make further Danger Evasion rolls (target number 10) whilst carrying out routine riding maneuvers. However, characters failing will not only take the 1D6 damage, they will also need to make another roll on the second day of their journey. Failure will result in another fall (and another 1D6 of damage). It is assumed that even the most inept riders will have learnt to cope reasonably competently on their camels by the third day!

Because of the hot desert sun, the best times to travel are in the early morning and the late afternoon. During the middle of the day, the adventurers are advised to halt, set up their tents and rest from the scorching mid-day sun. Travelling at night-time is considered ill-advised, due to the many perils of the desert, e.g. the greater risk of attack from wild animals, the greater difficulty in navigation, and the increased perils of befalling natural hazards like quicksand.

Characters with the *Desert Scout* background talent (possessed by most Khettim) are advantaged on all Danger Evasion rolls whilst traversing the Great Desert.

For each day of travel, and each night of rest, the Maze Master makes a secret roll upon the following Random Event tables (or alternatively, if he wishes, may simply chose encounters from the tables).

Towards the end in the afternoon of the third day (or later if the party has been delayed), as they are breaking camp, the adventurers discover that they have been surrounded by a scouting party of twenty Ubasti. The leader of the party will tell them, curtly, that they have strayed into the Ubasti's hunting-ground, and that they must accompany him to Khofer.

Desert Journeys: Random Events

Table 1 : Day-time

Roll *(D20)*	**Result**
1-10	Nothing happens
11-13	Sandstorm
14	Quicksand
15-16	Encounter with Desert Bandits
17	Encounter with Blood Trees
18	Encounter with Sand Demon
19	Encounter with Mirage Demon
20	Encounter with Thirst Demon

Table 2 : Night-time

Roll *(D20)*	**Result**
1-13	Nothing happens
14-16	Sandstorm
17	Encounter with Desert Bandits
18-19	Encounter with Anubians
20	Encounter with Sand Demon

Sandstorm: A heavy sandstorm causes the party to halt their journey. They must use their camels for shelter (tents would simply blow away). The sandstorm lasts for 1D6 hours. Each hour, each character must make a Danger Evasion roll and each camel makes an Evasion roll (target number 15 in both cases). Failure results in the target taking 1D3 hits damage from choking (dust inhalation) or abrasion (whirling sands).

Quicksand: The lead camel makes an Evasion roll, and the lead character a Danger Evasion roll (target number 15). If both rolls succeed, the quicksand is spotted and avoided. If the camel fails (but the rider succeeds), the camel is trapped in the quicksand, but the rider manages to crawl away. If the camel succeeds but the rider fails, the camel has avoided the quicksand, but, stumbling, has thrown the rider, who lands in the middle of it. If both fail – well, I think you can guess. Once mired in quicksand, individuals, and especially camels, are very hard to extricate (rope and Feats of Strength rolls will be required). After 1D6 battle rounds, the poor victim will vanish irretrievably beneath the unforgiving sands.

Desert Bandits: The party encounters 1D6+4 Desert Bandits (see *Creature Compendium*, p 59).

Anubians: The party encounters 3+1D3 Anubians.

Blood Trees : The party comes across an oasis which is actually guarded by 1D3+1 Blood Trees (see this issue's *Mythic Bestiary*).

Sand Demon: The party encounters a sand demon (see this issue's *Mythic Bestiary*).

Mirage Demon: The party encounters a mirage demon (see this issue's *Mythic Bestiary*).

Thirst Demon: The party encounters a thirst demon (see this issue's *Mythic Bestiary*).

The journey lasts for about three hours, during which time the ground gradually becomes firmer as the rolling dunes give way to rocky outcrops. Eventually, after ascending one particular stony ridge, the adventurers find themselves looking down upon a lush valley filled with palm and olive trees. The leader of the Ubasti scouting party points down into the valley, and says simply: 'Khofer.'

Before the Ubasti Prince

The adventurers are disarmed and searched (revealing the map and the manuscript), then taken to the Shal-ghali, and guided through its twisting, darkened corridors (darkened to human sight, of course), ascending all the while, until eventually coming out onto the open roof-top court that surmounts the citadel, giving a panoramic view over the village and across the whole oasis. Here they are thrust (probably none too gently) into the heavily-guarded presence of the lord of Khofer, prince Mafuda.

The Oasis of Khofer

Khofer is one of three oases in the western desert that are occupied by Ubasti. Of the three Ubasti tribes, those of Khofer have a particular reputation for their fierceness.

The oasis of Khofer is several miles across, and is striking for its abundant vegetation, producing in particular mangoes, dates and olives, as well as providing a home for many desert creatures. At the heart of the oasis is a lake which is held sacred to the goddesses Bastet, patron of the Ubasti. On the north side of the lake stands the temple of Bastet; but most of the Ubasti of Khofer dwell within the large village (population 2,000) on the opposite side of the lake in two-story houses made of mud-brick.

The houses are striking because many of them are interconnected by mud-brick archways, stairs and causeways, allowing the Ubasti to move just as easily from the upper levels of one building to another as it is for them to move along the alleyways below. Although there are several ground-level courtyards, much more striking are the luxuriant roof-gardens found on many of the Ubasti houses. The exterior walls are brightly-colored, painted in rich hues of ochre, terracotta, blue, as well as some in stark black and gleaming white.

Standing over the village of Khofer is the ancient fortress known as the Shal-ghali ('remote citadel' in the Ubasti tongue). This imposing five-storey building towers over the village, and is built of a combination of natural rock, salt, mud-brick and palm logs. For generations it has been the home of the Ubasti princes of Khofer.

On the far side of the Shal-ghali (away from the sacred lake) is the Arun-ghat ('blood bowl' in Ubasti), where ritual combats are fought, and the judgement of the princes is executed. This large, amphitheatre-like structure is capable of holding all the Ubasti of the village.

Can you trust an Ubasti ?

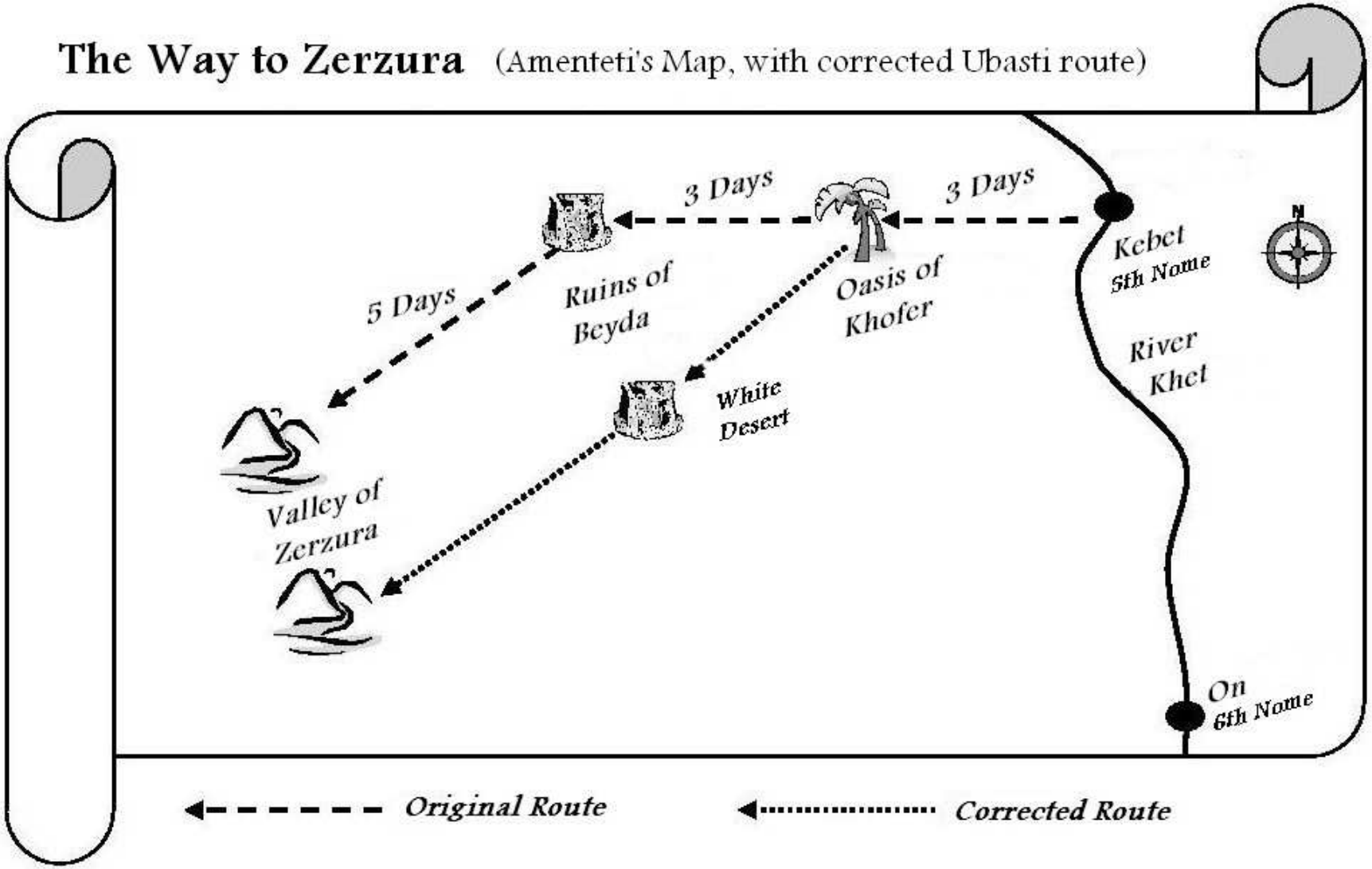
Mafuda is a tall, sleek, well-groomed Royal Ubasti, who lounges on an ample heap of soft plump cushions, and whose speech is relaxed and languid – a careful affectation that can easily catch the unwary off-guard. In truth, there isn't much that this ever-watchful Ubasti misses… Prince Mafuda wants to know why the travellers have strayed so close to Ubasti territory. He will listen to their story showing no visible sign of emotion – however, the rapid switching of his tail may betray a degree of agitation to the really observant…

Having listened to their tale, Mafuda will demand of the travellers: 'If you want to pass through Khofer with our blessing, you must first present us with an appropriate gift. Where is the statue of the blessed Bastet?' The player characters, of course, have no such gift – and Mafuda will swish his tail angrily as he says: *'Our last visitors were uncouth and discourteous suppliants – but at least they offered a statue of the goddess. Yet you come to the court of the Ubasti and offer…nothing!'*

How the player characters succeed in getting themselves out of this difficulty will depend, in part, upon their Influence skills (see pages 31-32 of the *M&M Companion*). To some extent the presence of particular character classes may also influence the outcome (as outlined in the boxed section below).

How Honest Will The Adventurers Be ?

Obviously, it is up to the players how open their characters are with the Ubasti prince. Understandably, they may be reluctant to tell Mafuda everything about the mission – on the other hand, if they invent an entirely fictitious tale, Mafuda is more than capable of using his Psychic Powers and Sharp Senses to ascertain whether or not the player characters are lying to him…he will, of course, be made even more suspicious by vague or incomplete answers to his questions, or, worst of all, silence. In addition, the map and manuscript clearly interest him…


The Way to Zerzura (Amenteti's Map, with corrected Ubasti route)
3 Days
3 Days
5 Days
Ruins of Beyda
Oasis of Khofer
Kebet 5th Nome
N
River Khet
White Desert
Valley of Zerzura
On 6th Nome
Original Route
Corrected Route

A Sign Of Treachery ?

This will probably be the first clue that the player characters will receive that their mission has been compromised by treachery. Those who are particularly astute may be able to work out that Akenhathor is a logical candidate to be the traitor…

There are a number of possible outcomes to the adventurers' interactions with Mafuda, including the following four suggestions:

Outcome 1 : Diplomacy Prevails

Mafuda's anger is somewhat eased by a sufficiently courteous and diplomatic response from the player characters. However, only if they are able to offer a suitable substitute gift for the statue of Bastet that they lack is Mafuda's wrath likely to be sufficiently assuaged for him to help them. And the presence of a gifted Lyrist might help too…

Outcome 2 : Blood Sports

Mafuda agrees to help the player characters only if they provide some 'sport' for his people: one of their number must fight the 'Champion of Khofer' in the Arun-ghat arena (treat the Champion as an Ubasti of Noble Blood, p 122 of the *Creature Compendium*). The battle, of course, is to the death. If the player characters' champion loses, then their lives are forfeit – if he wins, then Mafuda will allow them to pass through Khofer.

Outcome 3 : Trial by Combat

Mafuda decides that all the adventurers need to face the trial of the Arun-ghat. They will have to fight in the arena (before the baying crowd of Ubasti) against an appropriate mix of creatures (suggestions include a pair of Asheebas, a Giant Scorpion or Giant Lion, a troop of Hyenakin gladiators, perhaps a Rhinotaur…). The final challenge might be the 'Champion of Khofer' against a single adventurer, as outlined above. This outcome is quite likely if the party of player characters includes a Sorcerer and/or a Hunter, and Mafuda discovers this.

Outcome 4 : Marooned in the Desert

The characters completely botch their negotiations. The angry prince orders them to be cast out of the oasis without camels, weapons or supplies. They must find a way to get back into the village and recover their lost equipment – including the map! This is very much a worst-case scenario.

Assuming that the adventurers successfully win the respect of Mafuda (e.g. as in the case of the first, second or third possible outcomes given above), he will return the map and manuscript to them, explain the crucial error in the map, and will reveal more about 'the last visitors' to Khofer. However, if the characters are forced to resort to other means of recovering the map and manuscript (e.g. as in the case of the fourth possible outcome given above), then they will not receive any further information from Prince Mafuda - with, in all likelihood, unfortunate consequences for the continuation of their mission (like getting lost in the desert, for a start…).

Next : *The Ruins of Beyda*

Ubasti Attitudes Towards Adventurers

Saved by a Lyrist?

If the adventurers have a Lyrist within their party, there is a possibility that they can get themselves out of their rather tricky predicament by soothing the soul of the angry Mafuda. And any character with a basic knowledge of the Ubasti will know that they have a great love of music…

Sorcerers Beware!

Mafuda's Psychic Powers will make him particularly antagonistic towards any character that he suspects of having similar gifts – namely Sorcerers! Other magicians will also automatically be regarded with great suspicion (with the exception of Lyrists).

Way of the Warrior

The Ubasti will accord a modicum of honor towards cultures that have a strong martial emphasis. Amazons and Barbarians are most likely to garner the respect of Mafuda and his subjects. Spearmen, by contrast, are likely to be held in mild derision.

Hobnobbing with Nobility?

Mafuda will accord any individual of obvious Noble heritage an outward show of courtesy – but genuine respect is another thing, and this will very much depend upon the words, deeds and bearing of the Noble in question.

Other Classes

Centaurs, Nymphs and Thieves are looked upon with a mixture of amusement, contempt and indifference by Mafuda and his fellow Ubasti. And all Ubasti absolutely detest Hunters, and will see the presence of such a person in the party as a personal challenge!

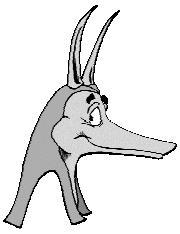
Mafuda's Tale

'*You are not the only recent visitors to Khofer. Four days before your arrival, another party of men arrived in our village. They had with them a map, identical in every way to yours.*

They brought with them the customary gift of any outsider who seeks passage through our territory – a statue of the blessed Bastet. According to our traditions, we let them pass – but they were arrogant and ill-mannered, and we liked them not. There was a darkness upon them which has corrupted their souls…

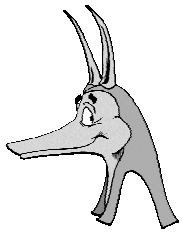
'As I said, they had a map identical to yours, and the next part of their journey, as they showed us, would take them to the ruins of Beyda – the city of the White Desert. However, their map (and yours) is incorrect in one detail. According to the map, Beyda lies three days due west of Khofer – but actually it lies three days to the south-west.

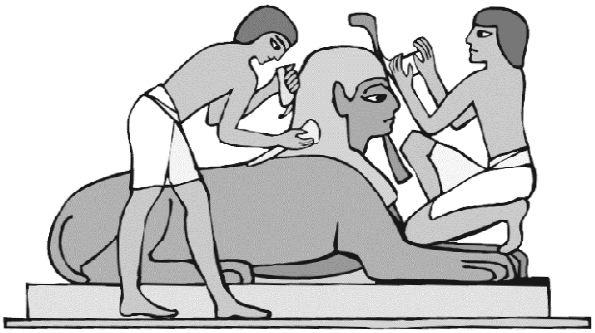
We chose not to correct your predecessors – and if the desert takes them to its bosom, then so be it. But you have proved yourselves worthy to the Ubasti – and for this reason we tell you the truth. If you wish to find the ruins of Beyda, heed my words!'



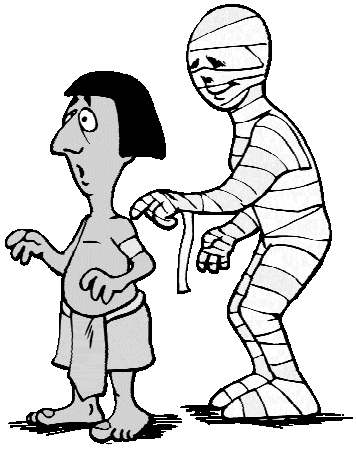
MINOTAUR MIRTH

DESERT KINGDOM SPECIAL !

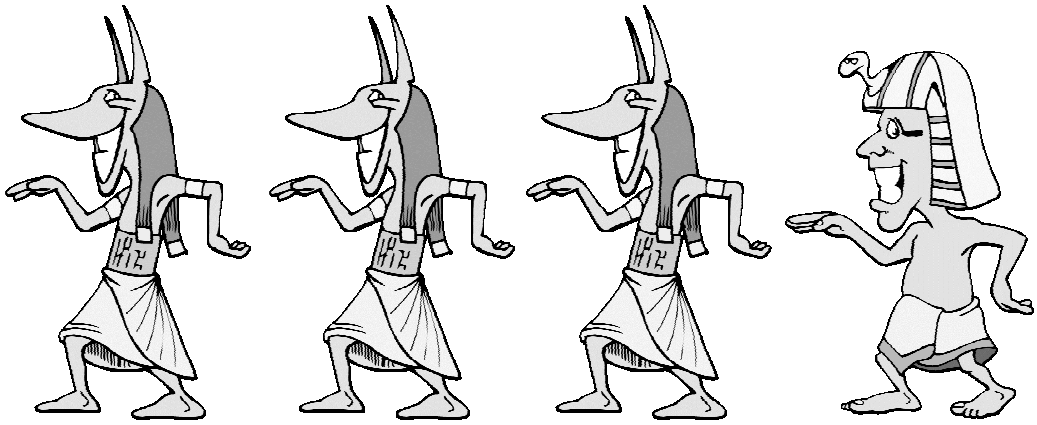




Grooming Time at the Mythic Menagerie
- Careful, Mike, or this damn beast will bite our heads off !



- Hey, dude, I think you've just failed your detection roll…



Walk like an Anubian ! (famous pop song from the 80s)

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LGS

A TWIST IN THE MAZE

A Regular M&M Column by Luke G. Reynard

(Not Quite) The Art of Ancient Warfare

It is a well-known fact that, despite what some over-enthusiastic fans would have us believe, the *Mazes & Minotaurs* combat rules have very, very little in common with the actual art of ancient warfare as practised by, say, real Greek Hoplites. Sure, the combat system enforces the supremacy of the spear over other melee weapons, Spearmen can shout « Shield Wall ! » as often as they want, but that's about it… And let's be honest : this is NOT a bad thing. Why ? Because M&M is NOT a historical or even pseudo-historical game – and was never intended to be taken as such. Rather, it is a fantasy roleplaying game of heroic adventure : hence, the way it depicts combat has (quite logically) more to do with Hollywood movies and fantasy novels than with historical accuracy or military simulation.

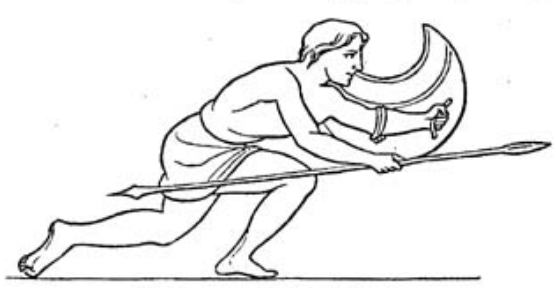
That being said, some M&M enthusiasts also feel that the « ancient world flavor » of our beloved game would only be reinforced by bringing a little bit more historical verisimilitude (or variety) to its choice of weapons, armor and fighting styles. The following optional rules and equipment were devised with such objectives in mind by Yours Truly and our friend **Darren Peech** (better known in some circles as « the Hoplite Nomad »), who brought the matter to my attention in the first place – a hearty minotaurian salute to him !

Shields

The standard M&M shield corresponds to the circular, metallic shield often seen in art and peplum movies.

Light infantry troops in Ancient Greece were actually equipped with crescent-shaped shields made of *wicker* (and often covered in goat or sheep skin) – these shields were called *pelte* and the troops which carried them were known as *peltasts*.

In game terms, a **peltatst shield** would grant a defensive bonus of +1 (instead of the usual +2) but would have an Encumbrance of 1 (instead of the usual 2). It would also be considerably cheaper than the standard bronze shield, as shown below.



A typical, crescent-shaped peltast shield

Spearman wearing a linothorax

Armor

The **linothorax** is a lighter form of breastplate made of multiple layers of linen (sometimes reinforced with leather). In game terms, a linothorax offers less protection than a standard (ie bronze) breastplate (+1 to EDC instead of +2) but is slightly less cumbersome (Encumbrance 2 instead of the usual 3), making the linothorax a favorite of Archers, skirmishers and other light infantry troops.

What might make the linothorax of special interest to M&M adventurers, however, is the way it interacts with special abilities such as an Amazon's *Battle Grace*, a Barbarian's *Battle Fury* or a Thief's *Evasion.* While the +1 EDC bonus of the linothorax does NOT stack with the special melee defensive bonus granted by these abilities, wearing a linothorax does NOT prevent a character from using such an ability. Wearing a linothorax actually reduces such characters' special defense bonus by 1 point… but this loss is offset by the +1 defense bonus granted by the linothorax itself, resulting in a final « penalty » of 0. Thus, an Amazon wearing a linothorax would still benefit from her Grace-based defense bonus in melee, with no bonus from her linothorax, but would benefit from the +1 bonus of her linothorax against all attacks not covered by her

Yes, that's a Boeotian helmet (sort of)

special defense bonus, such as missile weapons or surprise attacks. The same applies to Thieves, Barbarians and other classes with a special melee defense bonus. Thus, if Grondar the Barbarian (Basic Defense Class 13, Will mod +2) wears a linothorax, his melee EDC will still be 15 (his basic 13, plus his +2 Will-based Battle Fury bonus) but his Defense Class against missile or surprise attacks would be 14 (his basic 13, +1 for the linothorax).

Helmets

The standard M&M helmet is actually a full, Corinthian-style helmet, offering cranial as well as facial protection, unlike other types of helmets commonly worn by Greek soldiers (such as the **Boeotian helmet**), which offered little facial protection (see illustration above).

In game terms, such « partial » helmets would only grant a +1 bonus to Defense Class (instead of the usual +2) but would have the same Encumbrance value of 1 as standard (ie Corinthian) helmets.

So what advantage is there, you ask, to wear a Boeotian helmet instead of a standard, Corinthian helmet ? The answer is : none. But such helmets are somewhat cheaper, as shown below.

Spears vs Javelins

This might come as a shock to some of you but the M&M rules *do* treat spears and javelins as the same weapon. Yup, as far as M&M is concerned, « javelins » are simply thrown spears. That's why both weapons have the same price (30 silver pieces) and the same Encumbrance value (2)… but historically, spears and javelins were different weapons : javelins were shorter, lighter and used exclusively as missile weapons. Warriors often carried three javelins in addition to their other (ie melee) weapons.

When I asked Olivier Legrand about the reasons of this over-simplification, he told me (after the mandatory short pause and menacing glare) that it was *« precisely for simplicity's sake »* and that M&M was all about heroic fun and not about tactical simulation or historical nitpicking - well, he didn't use those exact words but a much more colorful mix of hand gestures and French swear words (man, you'd be surprised how many of these the French language has), which I took the liberty to translate in a more reader-friendly form of prose.

Anyway, back to our topic, here are some optional rules for those who want to differentiate spears and javelins in game terms.

Keep the spears as they are in the rules (Enc 2, 30 silver pieces etc) with the exception of their throwing range, which should be reduced by half (Might x 5', instead of Might x 10'). Give javelins the usual throwing range of Might x 10' but with half the usual Encumbrance value (1 instead of 2).

In times of emergency, such weapons can be used in melee in lieu of proper spears but without any of the various benefits granted to spear-users by the M&M combat system : no Holding Back opponents, no Initiative or Defense bonus for Spearmen etc. In other words, javelins used as spears in melee have the same characteristics as swords, without the possibilities of Weapon Parry or Disarming. In addition, a damage roll of 6 means that the javelin remains stuck into the defender's body and can no longer be used to attack.

Slingers

Slings were a very important weapon in ancient warfare and were often used by skirmishers and other « hit-and-run » troops, which often included marksmen as deadly as any bowman. In legends and popular culture, the sling is also the privileged weapon of the « shepherd hero ». Such characters can easily be translated in M&M terms as Hunters or Thieves but since the *M&M Companion* gave us the Archer, there should logically be room in a military-oriented campaign for a specialist class of Slinger.

Slingers should have exactly the same profile and special abilities as Archers, except that their special abilities of Marksmanship and Quick Aim would apply to slings instead of bows.

Their starting possessions, however, should be limited to a sling and 24 sling stones, a dagger, a sword and a starting wealth of 3D6 x 5 silver pieces (no helmet or breastplate for them !).

If Background Talents are used, all Slingers should be given the Woodsman and Mountaineer talents, reflecting their superior ambush and scouting skills.

Alternate Armament

Item	Enc	Cost
Linothorax	2	75 sp
Boeotian Helmet	1	40 sp
Peltast Shield	1	35 sp
Short Javelin	1	15 sp

Next Issue : *bringing firearms to the Bronze Age - OK, OK, just kidding (Is this supposed to be funny ? -* ***Ed****).*

Luke G. Reynard (2009)

OFFICIAL ORACLE

Official Oracle *is a new semi-regular department offering answers to questions about the* ***Mazes & Minotaurs*** *game rules and how these rules can be interpreted in special situations or applied to topics which are not explicitly covered in the various M&M rulebooks. As its title implies, all the answers given in this column can be treated as official rulings (if such things really matter to your gaming group) This issue, we take a look at two combat-related topics.* ***O.L.***

- Don't move ! I've got some new wrestling rules for you !

Wrestling Damage

The M&M wrestling rules do not allow a wrestler to inflict damage to a grappled foe if he so wishes, which seems a bit odd, since real-world wrestling techniques can cause physical injury. What if, for instance, a character wants to choke an opponent to death, just like Herakles did with the Nemean Lion ? Surely such a feat should be made possible in a game like M&M !

The *Mazes & Minotaurs* wrestling rules were originally intended as a non-violent form of unarmed combat. The *Players Manual* emphasizes this aspect of things by stating that "*the grappler himself may not directly attack his victim while maintaining his hold.*"

That being said, it should be possible for a wrestler with superior physical strength to cause physical injury to an immobilized opponent if he so wishes. This possibility represents 'wrestling for blood', crushing holds, choking a victim to death and other dirty tricks (which are of course absolutely forbidden during honorable wrestling competitions). Such actions can only be inflicted on an immobilized victim by the grappler himself and do not require a regular Melee roll : thus, they are not *« direct attacks »* in the usual M&M sense of the term.

Only wrestlers with an above-average Might (13+) may choose this option, causing a number of Hits of damage equal to his Might bonus to his immobilized victim at the end of each battle round. Thus, a wrestler with a Might of 15 (Might bonus +2) may inflict 2 Hits of damage per round to an immobilized victim. This damage is taken after the victim has failed its attempt to break free (ie no damage is taken if the victim manages to break free).

It should be noted that this tactic will be completely useless against Animates, for a variety of anatomical reasons : they either do not need to breathe (and so cannot be choked to death) or are completely immune to things like broken bones, dislocated joints etc.

Major NPCs & Glory Awards

How many Glory points do warriors receive for defeating Major NPCs ? The rules give formulas to calculate the Glory awards of creatures, which can also be used for Minor NPCs but I could not find any reference to the Glory awards of Major NPCs in any of the rulebooks. Is this an oversight ?

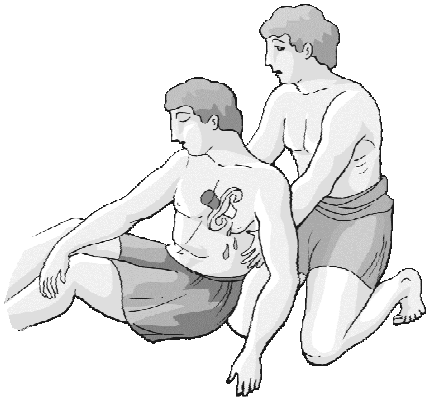
Yes, this is indeed an oversight from our part. The Glory award for defeating a Major NPC should be calculated using the following formula :

Basic Glory Award = (Level x 25)

This Basic Glory Award is *doubled* for Warrior NPCs. This represents the fact that, regardless of their actual power or resourcefulness, magicians and specialists are considered less glorious foes than warriors. Thus, a 3rd level Sorcerer would have a Glory Award of 75, while a 3rd level Noble would be worth 150 points.

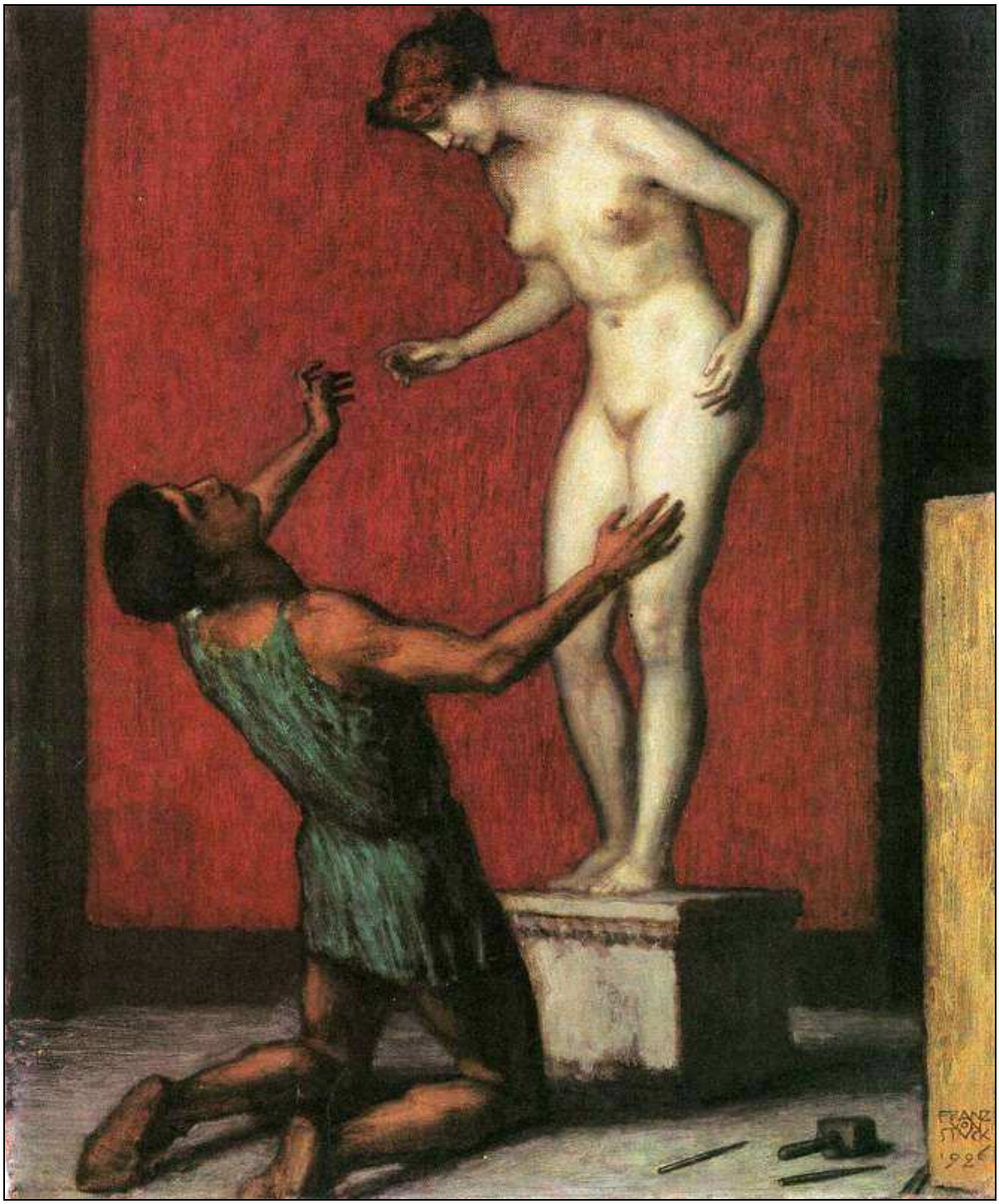
Also, since such things are taken into account for lesser opponents, each piece of armor or other protective equipment (including mythic items) granting a bonus to a warrior's Defense Class should also affect his Glory Award : simply add +5 Glory per +1 to EDC, *after* the basic Award has been doubled by the "warrior factor". Thus, a 3rd level warrior with a shield (+2), a helmet (+2) and a magical breastplate (+4) will be worth 190 Glory (150 for class and level, +40 for equipment). This Glory bonus for protective items only applies to warriors. Defense bonuses granted by class (such as a Spearman's shield-and-spear bonus or a Barbarian's Battle Fury) should not be taken into account here – because such bonuses do not apply to all situations and also because the x2 Glory multiplier already takes a warrior's superior combat skills into account.

As with all battle-related Glory awards, if the NPC was defeated by several warriors, then the total should be divided evenly between his various victors.



- Sigh, there go 100 Glory points…

Minotaur Play Nymph n°5



PYGMALION AND GALATEA**, by **Franz von Stuck